Beloved Daughters and Liberated Mothers: Duty and Rebellion in Three Indian Novels

“Beloved Daughters and Liberated Mothers: Duty and Rebellion in Three Indian Novels”

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Abstract

This study investigates how three Indian women novelists—Toru Dutt, Krupabai Satthianadhan, and Kamala Markandaya contributed to the discourse on women's rights and position in society in the nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth century. From the mid-nineteenth century on, "woman" became the site of resistance against the British by Indian nationalists. Based on "traditional" ideas of women's place in the household, as keepers of tradition and values, and as insulated from foreign influence outside the home, nationalists promoted a mythic ideal of womanhood as being synonymous with nation, of "Bharat Mata," of women as virtuous mothers, in order to resist the British charge that Indians were depraved and inferior. The British on their end, in their "civilizing" mission, sought to legislate women's reform, to end such practices as child marriage and sati as a moral justification for their rule. Indian women were spoken of and spoken for. My initial investigation into Indian women's literature in nineteenth century India proved that women were not always silent observers and recipients of male dominated discourse. Although history has largely forgotten the writers I study in this thesis, they did contribute to the debate concerning women's rights in the nineteenth and in Markandaya's case, mid-twentieth century India. Although separated by varying demands such as regional affiliation, religion, and identification with the colonizer, each struggled with the notion of independence for women. Additionally, all three writers wrote in English which gave them an audience in

the English reading Indian elite as well as in the British public. This afforded them the opportunity to be in the midst of the debate and not marginalized because of their sex and choice of language. English offered a certain status.

The most compelling questions I sought to answer in this thesis were, how do these Indian female writers resolve the conflict between individual desires and a society which seeks to oppress women for varying reasons? How are nationalist ideals of womanhood coopted and extended by these women writers? How can women express a will to self while remaining within a social structure that holds antithetical beliefs towards self-hood, especially if that self is female?

My conclusions were that the heroines in these novels do not seek to break away from their ties to their social group, be it their families or their community. Rather, they find fulfillment or resolution, through the socially acceptable female role of motherhood which is complicit with the nationalist idea of mothers as leaders and nurturers of the Indian nation. Motherhood is recast by these writers as a role in which women can receive physical and emotional sustenance. It becomes a space for women to define their own relationships without first having to define themselves in relation to a man and therefore offers the opportunity for self-definition.

Dedication

For Baba, Nani, Leela, and Kieran

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I would like to thank my father for the rigorous intellectual example he set, for his faith in my abilities, and for his self-sacrificing love. I have felt his presence throughout this process and know that he is proud of me. Also, my mother has steadfastly supported me, helping me to care for my children while I fulfilled my own dream of getting a graduate degree in English. To my children, Leela and Kieran, thank you for believing that I could do this. RJ, thank you for your immense patience and love. Thanks to Sue Weaver Schopf for originally pushing me to look beyond a Eurocentric body of literature about India. Talaya Delaney, my research advisor, helped me to focus my argument, encouraged my curiosity, and read through various proposal drafts. I am grateful to have Sharmila Sen as my thesis director. She has challenged me to grow as a writer and to appreciate the nuances of a careful argument.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Toru Dutt's sepia photograph on the frontispiece of Harihar Das' *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* (1921), stares seriously out at the viewer, a strong Indian face belying an eager intelligence, with lace collar and silk skirts, challenging my own assumptions about what Indian women must have been like over a hundred years ago. In what ways did this young woman defy the stereotypes of her own time? In what ways if at all, was I, a woman from India, indebted to her?

In my study of Toru Dutt, I found other Indian women writers who challenged existing social structures and managed to articulate and create identities that were self-forged, while remaining within the boundaries of acceptability. The first two authors I focus upon are Toru Dutt and Krupabai Satthianadhan who lived in the Indian subcontinent as subjects of Victoria who became the Empress of India in 1858, following the the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Kamala Markandaya, the third author of my study, wrote her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, in 1954, when the Indian nation state was less than a decade old. In *Nectar in a Sieve,* Markandaya addresses both the India of the past and the India of the present and future, when the ideal of womanhood was equally potent as it had been in the nineteenth century but was also involved in the process of nation-making.

Both Dutt and Satthianadhan wrote their novels during a watershed moment in Indian history, a time when Britain cemented her political rule of India and at a time which heralded the birth of Indian nationalism as a response to this foreign control. Toru Dutt's novel, *Bianca: Or the Young Spanish Maiden,* published in 1878, reflects the conflict of identity felt by the author, an adolescent upper-class Indian girl, who was deeply influenced by her time in England and her education in English. Krupabai Satthianadhan, a Christian convert, wrote *Kamala: The Story of Hindu Life* in 1872. Satthiandhan, influenced by ideals of Western emancipation, joined the debate on the status of woman in the Hindu extended family.

Bianca and *Kamala* are responses to how women's roles were being contested and defined by nationalists in the nineteenth century -- both traditionalists and progressives -- and by official British policy. *Nectar in a Sieve*, appeared at a point when nationalist ideology had cemented notions on what the ideal Indian woman was supposed to be. Indian feminist writers like Malashri Lal, Meena Alexander, and Meenakshi Mukherjee, both in Western and Indian academia, have sought to highlight that, in fact, women in India have been active participants in the discourse surrounding women's identities. My own contribution in this scholarly conversation, is to explore the ways in which Dutt, Satthianadhan, and Markandaya resist ideals of womanhood promoted by nationalists by writing narratives that assert individual experience. While the heroines of these narratives have certain idealized qualities such as being self-sacrificing and dutiful, they are complex characters who at times uphold traditional expectations of woman's character and at other times, rebel and articulate their

suffering and struggles as women in a patriarchal society. My particular concentration that adds to the study of woman writers in India, is to highlight how the authors in this thesis, focus on the physicality of their heroines. The depiction of this physical experience is particularly gendered. As care-givers and nurturers, women experience physical contact and sensory experience in ways that are uniquely different from men. While sexuality is downplayed in these novels, it also rises to the surface of the texts, in vague descriptions of desire and gratification. The assertion of female physicality is a strategy of resistance. It eludes a certain hegemonic myth of woman that denied that physicality. The writers I study present narratives that investigate how women felt pressured to conform to this myth and how they dealt with it.

In order to understand how these women writers came to write in English and to situate them within the context of Indian nationalism, it is important to contextualize how English became the *lingua franca* of an elite class of Indians and how then women began to read and speak it. The East India Company had operated a sort of shadow state, controlling India after that decisive battle against the Nawab of Bengal in 1757 in the the Battle of Plassey. Interestingly, one of the first words that entered the English language from India, was the word, "loot," which was effectively the policy of the Company Raj for one hundred years. But the rapacious exploitation of India's resources came head to head with a subtler and longer reaching philosophy of Britain's imperialism, both cultural and political.

In 1835, Thomas Babington Macaulay in his famous Minute on Indian Education, argued that English should be the medium for higher education in India. He

condescended to call the spoken modern Indian languages, "dialects," and proposed the promulgation of the English language and its literature. Those Indians educated in English would then educate their own countrymen and this would in turn lead to a "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in test, in opinions, in morals and intellect" (Macaulay qtd. In Ghosh, "An Introduction"). Leading up to the official annexation of India, Wood's Education Despatch of 1854 again stated the goal of higher education in India to be the "diffusion of the improved arts, sciences, philosophy and literatures of Europe" (Wood qtd. In Mukherjee, *Perishable Empire* 4). Three major universities, centers of English learning, were founded in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1857. The underlying belief of this education was that English culture was superior and in order to get the Indian to "behave," he must be taught to think like a European.

It is interesting to note that before English literature was a subject in Britain, it became a taught subject in India. It was not until the 1890s that the British elite saw fit to teach its literature to the working class masses in English polytechnics – working man's colleges. Also present at this time was the Calvinistic belief that people, Indians in this case, were depraved and sinful, and that literature had the power to reform (likely a similar impulse for teaching English literature to the British masses). According to Gauri Viswanathan in *Masks of Conquest*:

> The history of education in British India shows that certain humanistic functions traditionally associated with literature—for example, the shaping of character or the development of the aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking—

> were considered essential to the processes of sociopolitical control by the guardians of the same tradition. (3)

After the British suppressed the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, Parliament took over the official governing of India from the East India Company. The ruling of India now donned the cloak of "political altruism" and from now on, the desire to civilize the chaotic masses of Indians, to bring them culture [Western] and order was given an official stamp (Ghosh 19). The study of English and its literature became a major part of this civilizing mission. Viswanathan writes of the dual purpose of such an education, "as enabling the humanistic ideals of enlightenment to coexist with and even support education for social and political control" (3). Using Gramsci's ideas on culture and power, Viswanathan recognizes the two goals of the British in India-- both "domination" and "intellectual and moral leadership" (1).

A major result of this exposure to English literature in education was the rise of an English reading public in India who were an eager audience for that nineteenth mass-market innovation--the novel. The new genre was soon embraced by Indian writers, writing both in Indian languages and in English. Motifs, common in English nineteenth-century novels are undeniably traced in Indian novels of this time. As cultural artefacts, Indian novels of this time, offer a unique perspective into the adaptation of Western motifs and narrative structures (such as the bildungsroman or the psychological novel) to the Indian scene. In the West, until possibly the twentieth century, with the the exception of Joseph Conrad, a Pole, and Vladimir Nabokov, a Russian, the English novel was written by those men and women who generally spoke English as a first language.

Not so in South Asia, where the multi-lingual writer has, for much of history, been the norm, not the exception. In his foreward to *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao, states:

> The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can only write as Indians. (v)

Rao captures the essence of the Indian writer's multi-lingual identity. Even when writing in one's native language, the novel itself is an imported cultural product and thus bears the mark of hybridity, or external influence. Bankimchandra Chatterjee, one of the first graduates of the university in Calcutta, turned to writing in his native language, Bengali. In order to write novels in Bengali, he had to "modernize" his own language in order to make the imported genre reflect the "emotional make-up" of his "thought movement." In 1899, Muhammad Hadi Ruswa, wrote *Umrao Jaan Ada*, the first novel in Urdu, about a courtesan in Lucknow who recounts the story of her life, from poor kidnapped village girl to temptress of men's hearts. I will return to these two writers momentarily, but it is important to note that the women writers in my study, also dealt with this dual identity. Toru Dutt came from an illustrious Bengali family and although her father converted to Christianity and encouraged his children to speak and write in English, Bengali was her

mother tongue. Satthianadhan hailed from a Brahmin family who also converted to Christianity and was ethnically Marathi. Kamala Markandaya (born Puranaiah) was born in Mysore State and went to an English-medium school. As bilingualism is a feature particular to the Indian experience, English too becomes an Indian "dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American" (Rao v-vi).

The Formation of Woman in Nationalist Ideology

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a frequent subject of nationalist discourse was the question of women's reform, inspired in part by liberal women's reform in England. By the end of the nineteenth century, the subject had all but disappeared from male dominated nationalist discourse. Before I go on to discuss how the women's question was taken up by and furthered by the women writers in this study, even as it became less central to nationalist reform, it is important to see where nationalist ideology went in the latter part of the century. Women writing in the second half of the century both continued grappling with the women's question and responded to the construction of "woman" by nationalists. In "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," Partha Chatterjee delineates nationalist ideology into two distinct domains—inner and outer or "*ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world," referencing Rabindranath Tagore's 1916 novel, *At Home and the World* (Chatterjee 238). Nationalists saw the outer world as Western and materialistic and the inner world as Indian and spiritual. The West excelled at the outer world but the East was far superior in the spiritual domain. The West had colonized and taken India's material assets but the inner-spiritual and

traditional life of the people had remained untouched. The inner, spiritual realm was also synonymous with the home. And in further distinguishing the two domains, the outer world was seen as male and the home as female. Women therefore, not only became the protectors of native culture but guardians of spiritual virtue that Indian men could lean on when tempted by the material West. Chatterjee describes this new construction of woman:

> The new woman defined in this way was subjected to a new patriarchy. In fact, the social order connecting the home and the world in which nationalists placed the new woman was constructed not only with that of modern Western society; it was explicitly distinguished from the patriarchy of indigenous tradition, the same tradition that had been put on the dock by colonial interrogators. Sure enough, nationalism adopted several elements from tradition as marks of its native cultural identity, but this was now a 'classicized' tradition—reformed, re-constructed, fortified against charges of barbarism and irrationality. . ." (Colonized Women 627).

While Western women were educated so that they might compete in the material world with men, the new Indian woman was educated to enhance her spiritual worth. Chatterjee points out that women were encouraged to read traditional Indian scriptures and to become skilled in the traditional Indian arts. Like the British before them, nationalists too sought to use literature to inculcate those virtues deemed necessary to further their ends.

To complicate what nationalists saw as a proper Indian education for women, was the concurrent rise in girls being educated in English. English was the language of public discourse and other Indian languages were the language of home. But the dichotomy set up between the two domains was not to last. Male writers like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, made the conscious decision to continue his private correspondence in English but to write publicly in Bengali as a nationalist statement. For a certain class of educated Indians, an increased intimacy with English meant that even as it was foreign, it became a dialect and entered the private life of the home. For this elite class, English became at least a second language and their knowledge of it further divided them from other Indians. To this day, knowledge of English is a class-marker and a sign of privilege in the subcontinent.

With this entrée into the home, Indian women in the upper classes also learned English and began to read English novels. Novels were a domestic entertainment, a product for the new leisure classes in Europe, and similarly were embraced by a bourgeois audience in India. Progressive leaning baboos, those elite Indian men who were English educated and anglicized to a certain extent, thought an English-educated daughter was more marriageable and was a reflection of her father's modernity. Embracing modernity in India, is not a rejection of Indian values and thus has been able to coexist with tradition to this day. Therefore, women's education in English which was conflated with modernity, flourished alongside more conservative views that espoused women's education in Indian languages and culture. The "new woman" of nationalist ideology drew her wisdom from her study of traditional Indian arts and religious texts.

There was also a prevailing conservative Hindu myth at the time that if daughters were to be educated, they would become early widows. The question of how a woman was to be educated did not coalesce into a singular argument and view but remained contested in nationalist discourse.

Women's education and status in Indian society is a predominant concern in nineteenth-century Indian novels. Male writers were not unsympathetic to women. In Bankimchandra Chatterjee's English novel, *Rajmohan's Wife*, the heroine Matangini, is a victim of a bad marriage to an unscrupulous dacoit, Rajmohan. Matangini saves her sister and her brother-in-law from her husband's plot to burglarize their home and then in a burst of passion declares her love for her brother-in-law, Madhav. It is Madhav who begs her to forget him and is able to gain control over his passion. Matangini is brave but ultimately it is the hero who silences her desire and beseeches her to go back to her father's house. Her desire is unbridled and requires the regulatory male voice to keep it in check. The third person narrator is sensitive to Matangini's plight but not without judgment. Similarly, in Ruswa's *Umrau Jaan*, the bildungsroman of a courtesan is told through the voice of the male Urdu poet, who overhears Umrau's sad story. The female narrative is filtered through the male gaze. In each of the three novels in my study, female desire, as articulated by women, is transgressive in its very articulation. But rather than the authors' tone being threatening, this articulation acknowledges that women too feel desire and struggle when it is checked or repressed. In novels by male writers of the time, strong and rebellious heroines are admired but made to pay dearly for their social transgressions.

Both Krupabai Satthianadhan and Toru Dutt, the nineteenth-century women novelists I study, were educated in English by their fathers, Hindu Brahmins who converted to Christianity and were encouraged to write by the men in their life. Perhaps due to the fact that their fathers were Christian and were influenced by British ideas on the women's question, or as a result of their heightened class status, both received informal and formal training in the language of the colonizer. There are other nineteenth-century Indian women writers in English, such as Cornelia Sorabji and Pandita Ramabai, who were also Anglican Christian, which begs the question of whether religion became an entrée into Englishness. Regardless of which came first, a certain type of Protestant Christianity and the English language seem to be intertwined. This corroborates Viswanathan's argument about English education's purpose in India—as being both practical and as importing Western "values" to India. Both writers' fathers, converted to Christianity due to their reading of Christian scripture reflecting the Protestant principle of relying on the Bible for inspiration (*sola scriptura*)—not as a result of being influenced by missionaries or proselytization. In this way, both authors' believed that their own Christianity was a deeply personal experience. While Satthianadhan was clear about her identity as an Indian and as a Christian, Dutt's own relationship with Englishness as connected to a value system and her ambivalence about "how" Indian she was, complicated her relationship to Christianity. Dutt's religion was inextricably linked to an identification with being somewhat English. By deciding not to write in English, Indian authors like Bankimchandra Chatterjee rejected the English way

of seeing the world. By writing in English, Dutt and Sattianadhan, accepted elements of English discourse – as a way of seeing the world and articulating experience.

Although both Dutt and Satthianadhan were frequently cited in anthologies of Indian writing in English (starting with K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English* in 1962), their work remained obscure and out of print for over a hundred years, until Indian feminist writers rediscovered them in the latter part of the twentieth century. What is especially remarkable about these two writers is that while reading English might have been allowed as a private pleasure, to write in it was to enter into a discourse that was specifically male. Coupled with the fact that novels, even in Europe, were viewed as down-market and had suspiciously nefarious ideas that might corrupt upper-class girls, both Dutt and Satthianadhan used the genre to subvert and question those middle-class codes that dictated proper feminine behavior. While Dutt wrote a romance, unpublished and hidden in her room during her life time, Satthianadhan used the novel's mass appeal and accessibility to expose the unfair treatment of women in the traditional Hindu family.

According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, English was a "gender-specific skill in nineteenth-century India" (*Perishable Empire* 19). The patriarchal myth of women was that, as preservers of the native culture and language, their story-telling was oral, repeating and preserving Hindu myths, passing on traditional culture to their children. In fact, both Dutt and Satthianadhan had mothers who resisted their husband's conversion to Christianity and especially in Dutt's case, told their daughters the traditional stories of Hindu myth. Both writers created work that was an amalgam of

influences--the domestic realm of women's story-telling and the outside realm of published writing. Both written and oral Indian literature had previously focused on epic stories and the emphasis was on the fate of an entire group. With the introduction of the novel, and the use of English, the focus shifted on to the individual story. In this way, the novel was employed as a genre of resistance as Indian women writers created female protagonists who in asserting their individual wills clashed with the roles expected of women.

Malashshri Lal, like Partha Chatterjee, delineates Indian social structure as an inside/outside dichotomy. In *The Law of the Threshold: Women Writers in Indian English*, she adds a third space to the dichotomy, the threshold itself, which is not static but transformative and often painful: "when gender roles are subject to redefinition, the notion of gender becomes most acute... when a woman debates about her affiliation to the alternative influences, she is painfully conscious of every implication of the projected shift" (17). It is at this threshold that women writers place themselves in "acting" or writing. Their heroines are also most conflicted when they step on to this third space and yet are inevitably drawn to it. Women are "protected" by the walls of the haveli but are also necessarily confined. I find this methodology useful in contextualizing the creative efforts of all three women writers in my study. When a woman steps on to the threshold, she is "acutely aware of isolation" (18). She must face the hostility of the male dominated outside world and the disapproval of the traditional order of the home. She is seen as "anti-family, anti-home" (19). Kamala Markandaya, widely published in the West, has been criticized as "un-Indian," a twentieth-century

signifier of being "anti-home." Lal claims that a woman "seldom makes the physical departure from home that promises absolute anonymity" (20). My hypothesis is that when each heroine in my study, crosses the threshold by acting in ways that are considered unfeminine, by wishing to choose her own husband in *Bianca*, by seeking knowledge in *Kamala*, or by seeking control of her fertility by seeing a Western doctor in *Nectar*, they become vulnerable to hegemonic powers that seek to limit women's agency. In a sense, they are "outed" and disciplined.

For women writers to have written at all and in English at that there had to be some sort of complicity between the woman writer and the father/husband/society who "allowed" her articulation. Perhaps this complicity/compromise delineates the boundaries to which the author pushes her narrative. In none of the three novels does the heroine reject her role as daughter, daughter-in-law, or mother. However, while the heroines are dutiful and self-sacrificing, all three authors imbricate the conflicted private thoughts and unconscious actions of their characters on to the acceptable elements of the narrative—when they "behave." *Bianca* and *Kamala* are written as psychological novels, showing the inners thoughts and feelings of the protagonists through sympathetic third-person narrators. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the first-person narrator shares an account of her life. I aim to show how all three of the Indian women writers create characters who are rebellious, and manage to forge conscious identities, while at the same time acknowledging the need for community in ways that are culturally specific and staging their dissent within the existing patriarchal structures that seek to limit them.

The Persistence of Myth: Confinement and Freedom

Nineteenth century male literary effort largely focused on the creation of a romanticized, mythic ideal of both male and female genders as an effort to empower a culture that was seen as emasculated by the presence of colonial British power. Bengali nationalists pushed for a revival of the strong Indian male, ready to shake the centuries of domination by the Moghuls and then the British, a vigorous male both intellectually and physically capable of resisting the oppressor. The ideal Hindu male was modeled on the figures of the great Indian epics, Rama from the *Ramayana* and Arjuna from the *Mahabaratha*. Heroines from Indian myth were called upon as the ideals for womanhood, mainly Sita and Savitri (not Draupadi the polyandrous wife of the Pandavas who was revengeful and indignant). Sita represents the stoic, long-suffering and obedient wife who is willing to sacrifice everything for her husband, Rama. Savitri is a wise and dutiful wife, saving her husband from the god of death, Yama. The myths of Sita and Savitri, form the core cultural ideals that virtuous women must adhere to in Indian society. Nineteenth-century Indian male novelists reflected a societal belief that women must act in supportive roles to the men in their lives, their worth being measured by their duty to their husbands.

These mythologized ideals represented the spiritual core of Indianness, first as a defensive response to the British claim of native depravity, and then as a patriarchal source of pride, in the virtuousness of its women. What other theorists have not to my knowledge acknowledged is that racial purity is a source of pride amongst India's upper

classes and in strictly regulating women's bodies and activities, the threat of contamination is held at bay. Related to this control of the female body, is the idea that any function of it related to sex is impure. Female sexual desire is a threat to the preservation of power within most classes. It is clear that Hindu culture is not alone in this denial of female sex, but in the context of this study, I would like to focus upon how Dutt, Satthianadhan, and Markandaya deal with this repression. Malashri Lal sweeps a broad critique of Indian women novelists, saying that "physical dimensions are systematically eliminated" perhaps as a sign of these novelists' middle-class/patriarchal inhibitions (15). Since Indian women writers must exist within the framework of their community, expressions of overt sexuality are seen as taboo as much as sexuality is taboo in all facets of Indian culture (including in the works of male writers). I argue that on deeper examination, there is an intense awareness of the physical self that emerges in these novels—a clear response to the disembodied nationalist ideal of womanhood and to cultural inhibitions on the body that are class based.

American feminists, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe female writing as "palimpsestic," that is "works whose surface design conceal and obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (73). Female desire is present but is often concealed in ways that allow the novels to "pass" through the judgment of the patriarchal gaze that denies. Lal's characterization of Indian literature containing the "trope of mild rebellion" is cogent in interpreting these works in the Indian context. The conscious writer will not broach taboo subjects for shock value but rather physical experiences are implied and conveyed in a style that avoids harsh

realism. While the physical description of sex or death is never sanctioned, the workings of the female body are predominant in all three novels. After Bianca's first kiss, "a strange feeling of unutterable bliss mingled with pain came upon her...how strange, how soul thrilling that touch of his lips was" (Dutt 76). Mixed with female guilt are the stirrings of physical passion. In addition to sexual desire, our heroines suffer the death of children, husbands, and perhaps most strongly the physicality of motherhood. Rather than the immaterial feminine ideals of male nationalist writers, Dutt, Satthianadhan, and Markandaya evoke corporeal subjects.

But where all three novelists converge with their male counterparts is that for a woman or man for that matter in Indian culture, there is no peace in the fulfillment of selfish desire, only in the renunciation of the self. As corporeal subjects, the heroines in Satthianadhan's and Markandaya's novels achieve a sort of self-renunciation (as this is a lauded state) by moving past the stage of sexual desire and the binding role of being a wife through widowhood; however, they find consummation in motherhood, not marriage. Unlike men who are free to leave the world and become *sanyasis*, a woman's lot is always to remain within the world of family and duty. In *The Ramayana*, Sita, who is repeatedly abandoned by her husband, Rama, is allowed to raise her sons in the forest and in a final absolution is swallowed up by her mother, the Earth. She rejects Rama and commits an act of "ritual suicide" and the "act of suicide can be interpreted as the ultimate counter-aggression of the powerless" (Sutherland 78). Sita's refusal to return to her husband via the act of returning to her own mother, the earth, is "an

expression of a socially acceptable and highly sublimated act of counter-aggression against a figure of (*male*) authority" (78).

I argue that while Satthianadhan's and Markandaya's heroines commit acts of sublimation and self-sacrifice that are expected of them, they, like Sita, are able to rise above their circumstances and acknowledge their femininity as mothers. Sita raises her two sons in the forest, without the help of Rama. As mothers, they exemplify the feminine creative force or *shakti*. It is by their duty to their children, the ultimate unselfish act, that women are able to circumvent the binary imposition as the oppressed. The mother-child relationship creates an alternative structure that is not bound around a woman's place as a possession of a man but allows for female agency and a space for a woman to define her own interactions with another being. Ironically, the relegation of women to the enclosed space of the home and to the role of mother becomes a locus of power for women.

The connection to nature is something that marks mythic heroines. Sita means "found in the furrow" as her father, King Janaka found her in a furrow in a field. Devdutt Pattanaik in his essay, "Sita as Gauri, or Kali," draws this connection between Sita and the Earth:

> The Earth can be domesticated. Wild, she is the forest. Domesticated, she is the field. Wild, she is a woman. Domesticated, she is the wife. In Hindu mythology, wild Earth is visualized as Kali, an unclothed goddess, fearsome, naked, bloodthirsty, one with hair unbound. Domesticated Earth is visualized as Gauri, the goddess of civilization, gentle, demure, beautiful, draped in cloth. Gauri's

> cloth represents the rules that turn nature into civilization—rules such as marital fidelity, which ensure that even the weakest of men has conjugal security. (18)

Although Sita is Gauri, domesticated wife and even as far back as the *Rigveda* known as the blesser of fields, she retains the wildness of the unclothed goddess. As daughter of the Earth, she asks her mother to take her back after her husband's rejection of her and refuses to continue serving the patriarchal structure that has repeatedly cast aspersions on her purity. In returning to the Earth, Sita also plays out the beneficial mother-child relationship but as a daughter.

In this thesis, I will show how Kamala and Rukmani are evocative of Sita, specifically in context to their closeness to nature; nature becomes a space that is nurturing and although wild, a place of refuge from the pressures of living under a patriarchal system. All three heroines—Bianca, Kamala, and Rukmani, are Gauri as mothers and simultaneously Kali who is the symbol of the untamed Earth and of female desire. Ironically, Mother Earth is conflated with Mother India in nationalist ideology; her Kali-like nature is denied and only her benign motherhood is highlighted. In Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani, is a clear response to Gandhian notions of the ideal woman as Sita, peaceful spirit of the swadeshi movement. Rukmani is an inspiration to her men as Gandhi intended women to be, pure in heart, hard-working and resourceful. But there is a pivotal moment in the novel when Rukmani turns into Kali, symbolizing the rage of nature upon her children, and she blindly and mistakenly attacks her daughter. This event becomes central in Markandaya's resistance to the

nationalist definition of woman and further invokes the corporeal subject that cannot be reduced to impossible ideals.

Power, Gender, and Family Relations

Bankimchandra Chatterjee succinctly summarized the purpose of nationalist discourse on women: "Self-interested men are mindful of the improvement of women only to the extent that it furthers their self-interest; not for any other reason" (Chatterjee qtd. In Kafka 3). The major purpose of my own work is to show how three women writers, Toru Dutt and Krupabai Satthianadhan in the nineteenth century, and Kamala Markandaya in the mid-twentieth century, confronted the patriarchal construction of an ideal, abstracted construction of womanhood by offering female-driven narratives that provide subjects that are physical presences in their world, and share experiences grounded in the material and emotional reality of women in Indian society.

While Marxist theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, is critical of French critic, Michel Foucault's stance in privileging the "personal nature of resistance," (Maggio 423) I find his definition of power relations not to be at odds with the greater historical trends of colonialism and nationalism. The personal/individual nature of each heroine's stories, contests the sort of reductive thinking that women would necessarily have to have a shared or singular experience. The personal is always positioned within the historical and is always subject to its forces. The genre of the novel most often deals with the conflict between the individual and socio-historical forces. In *History of*

Sexuality, Volume 1, Michel Foucault traces how sex has been thwarted by the hegemony of patriarchal power in the West. This methodology also relates to India with its similar hierarchal power structures and sex as a mode of repression. I am extending Foucault's use of the word "sex" to mean the physical gendered body. Foucault writes:

> To deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition. Its objective: that sex renounce itself. Its instrument: the threat of a punishment that is nothing other than the suppression of sex. Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not appear if you do not want to disappear. (107)

In Toru Dutt's *Bianca*, sexual desire connotes selfishness and the extreme guilt and self-denial that the heroine experiences, manifests as physical sickness and mental anguish. Women have learned to "renounce themselves" in order to survive in a patriarchal system and this renunciation is further complicated in the Indian context as it is a spiritual ideal.

In Satthianadhan's novel, the child-bride, Kamala, is ignorant of this invisible set of rules and suffers the judgment of her husband's family. Foucault's model for power helps to elucidate the structure of the Indian extended family unit. He sees such large systems as the sovereign state as "terminal forms" that power takes but power must be understood as a "multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (117-118). According to Foucault "power comes from everywhere" and therefore power is not situated simply outside in the public sphere but rather is equally present within the domestic sphere (118). I think

Foucault's choice of phrase to describe power in terms of "force relations" is pertinent in thinking of power as a force like electricity. It flows and collects but is not static. Kamala's mother-in-law and sisters-in-law, somewhat disenfranchised as women themselves, must defend their stake in the structure and exercise their power to limit hers. They seek to end her efforts at learning because it is not just unwomanly but because it allows her the potential to exercise power, to be close to the men. Kamala dares to be visible to the men instead of staying in the kitchen and the women in the household are the first to render her invisible by banishing her to dark corners of the haveli.

Using Foucault's model, power within the extended family structure is hierarchical but also negotiable. As outsiders in a familial system, daughters-in-law are most subject to its regulatory force. It is for this reason that Satthianadhan's Kamala suffers and one of the reasons why Bianca's father worries about her marrying into an aristocratic family with a hostile mother-in-law. In Markandaya's mid-century novel, Rukmani's family is nuclear and she is not subject to the regulatory actions of an extended family. Her actions are circumscribed by the local community and the hegemonic presence of the ideal of Indian womanhood. On a macro-social level, if we assume like Foucault, that all human relations are governed by power, then the act of writing by these women writers, is an attempt to participate in and question the ideological discourse that produced a definition of ideal womanhood which as I shall argue is always historically driven and mythic at the same time.

Chapter II

Bianca: Or the Young Spanish Maiden

Toru Dutt's Divided Self

Today, Toru Dutt is known mostly for her poetry. During her short life, Dutt achieved renown for *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876), a collection of eight original poems and two hundred translated French poems. Both her novels, *Bianca: Or the Young Spanish Maiden* written in English and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle D'Arvers* written in French, were discovered in her room by her father after her death of consumption at the age of twenty-one. He published both works, the former in serial form and the latter, as a complete novel. Dutt is best known for her contributions in reviving India's glorious mythic past in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. Her poetry is marked as worthy of canonization as it fits neatly into the nascent Indian nationalist project, a woman writing to resurrect her country's mythic past in *Ancient Ballads*, her nostalgic poetry of youth in a Romanticized India, and simultaneously pleasing Western readers as a translator of French poetry (*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*). Her ballads also appeared at a time when folk stories and ballads were all the fashion in Europe.

Le Journal de Mademoiselle D'Arvers was published in France with the help of her friend, the Orientalist, Clarisse Bader, but *Bianca: Or the Young Spanish Maiden*, considered a fragment, or an incomplete novel at best, was serialized in *Bengal*

magazine from January-April, 1878. More recently, Indian critic, Malashri Lal recognizes *Bianca's* value as a cultural artifact that is both personal and "depersonalized enough to reflect the milieu of its composition" (39). The novel asserts the material subjectivity of the artist herself (with autobiographical elements). Her heroine struggles to conform to expectations based on her gender, race, and familial loyalty. Similarly, the young Dutt negotiated an identity that was influenced by at times contradictory ideas—the Victorian notion of the "angel of the house" which at times aligned with the expectations of women in the Indian milieu, as colonial subject, as member of an upper-class Brahmin family who had converted to Christianity, and as the last surviving child of her parents.

The novel has been labeled as autobiographical and it indeed follows real life events in Toru Dutt's young life. Toru's father, Govin Chunder studied English literature at Hindu College in Calcutta. After being overlooked for a promotion which he suspected was due to his race, he gave up his post as Assistant Controller General of Accounts in the colonial government and spent the rest of his life devoted to literary pursuits – writing and reviewing literature. While his children did not have a formal education, he educated his son and two daughters at home. He also hired an elderly Christian gentleman, Baboo Shib Chunder Banerjee, in Calcutta to tutor his children and exposed them to his favorite English poets, Wordsworth and Coleridge. The youngest of three siblings, Toru's father described her as "Elf-willed and shy, ne'er heeding when I call,/ Intent to pay her tenderest addresses/ to bird or cat,--but most intelligent" (Das 11). She lost her brother Abju when he was fourteen and she was nine (1865). The desolate

father then moved his wife and two daughters, Aru and Toru, to France in 1869. The girls were the first Bengali women to visit Europe that we know of. They landed in the south of France where the girls quickly mastered French, and later in 1870 they sailed to England. After a brief foray in London, the family settled in Cambridge in 1871. There, Toru and her sister, Aru, attended the Cambridge "Higher Lectures for Women" and befriended the daughter of a Reverend Martin, Mary. Much of what we know about Toru Dutt is through her letters written to her dear friend, Mary Martin, published in Dutt's biography by Harihar Das in 1921. Both sisters were showing signs of tuberculosis and fearing what another English winter would do to his daughters, Govin Chunder Dutt moved his family back to Calcutta in 1873. In July of 1874, Aru passed away. A lonely, grieving Toru was sequestered in the city and country homes of the family, Rambagan and Baugmaree, and much of her creative output comes from this time.

In Malashri Lal's estimation, *Bianca*, written when Toru was only seventeen, is a "meditation on the nature of female solitude" (45). The ultimate solitude, death, is never far away and in this sense *Bianca* is a *memento mori,* the last life urges of a dying writer. In her letters to Mary Martin, she frequently mentions the deaths and physical illnesses of her acquaintances, family, strangers, and animals: "Bishop Milman is dead; he succumbed to an acute attack of dysentery, and congestion of the liver," "the Maharaja of Pattialla died a few days ago at Simla of apoplexy," "Mama got a very bad fall yesterday," "one of our guinea pigs is afflicted with a *goitre*" (Das 141-153). As often as Dutt writes about the births of kittens and calves at Baugmaree, she catalogues a list of physical weaknesses and deaths that seem to haunt her. The novel begins on a "cold,

drizzling day of February" (Dutt 32). It is a solitary scene, a funeral procession, with two mourners, the eighteen-year old Bianca and her father, Alonzo Garcia. The departed is none other than Inez, Bianca's older sister. She feels a survivor's guilt, fretting over Inez, "with nothing between her and the inclement sky, but a thin oak-plank" while she, "so strong, be housed from the weather in a warm, lighted room" (36). She opens her window and sits outside on the cold hard wintry ground, "all alone, in the snow," until reminded by a housemaid of her duty to her father, to live (37). Like Dutt herself, Bianca feels the loneliness of being the last living child of a parent, and the immense pressure to be a companion and solace to her father.

In "Outcaste Power: Ritual Displacement and Virile Maternity in Indian Women Writers," Meena Alexander borrows from Jean Baudrillard in her description of Indian woman's writing. As in the case of Toru Dutt, the woman writer of the nineteenth century found herself "working her way towards a reality that had no readily conceivable form," borrowing from Jean Baudrillard's concept of the "hyperreal," a simulacrum of a real that might never have existed (367). With no female material forebears, straddling both Indian and English identities, Toru Dutt 's *Bianca* is a "woman writer's quest for her own story; it is the story in other words, of the woman's quest for self-definition" (Gilbert & Gubar 76). In England, Toru Dutt was a foreigner and a colonial subject. In Calcutta, Dutt spent much of her time alone at her family's country estate. She did not associate with many girls her age, writing letters to Mary Martin instead. One gets the sense from her letters, that the author felt lost in both worlds, feeling foreign in England as well as different from other Indian women, in her literary

pursuits and cultural influences, and in her unmarried state. What Dutt tries to articulate in her work of fiction is an attempt to puzzle together these different parts of her identity and the loneliness of her position.

The manuscript, buried in her room at her ancestral home in Rambagan in Calcutta, is a case of a young woman writer "hiding" a part of her real self in exchange for the legitimacy which she got through her poetry, the retellings of classical Indian myths, and through the translations of French male poets. Called a "sketch" by her father, with certain inconsistencies (Lord Moore's name, for instance, changes from 'Colin' to 'Henry'), the text follows the trajectory of what Gilbert and Gubar identify as "publicly presenting acceptable facades for private and dangerous visions" in which "women writers have long used a wide range of tactics to obscure but not obliterate their most subversive impulses" (74). The plot is that of a Victorian romance. We know from a letter dated April 24, 1876, that she read *Jane Eyre* although she disapproved of Rochester: "Though the *moral* is not very high (for the authoress favours bigamy), the work is written with a masterly power, and shows a gift of discerning characters, which is wonderful in a woman" (Das 147). Bianca has echoes of *Jane Eyre*--an unequal union between a man and a woman of different classes and female madness. Gilbert and Gubar's seminal 1979 work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, posits that Bertha Mason, Rochester's insane wife in *Jane Eyre*, functions as the author's double as a way for Brontë to express her most most "subversive impulses." Interestingly, Dutt also uses madness to explore rebellion against a patriarchal society. Like Brontë's Bertha Mason, Bianca's racial origins are murky. Dutt's diction raises the apparition of miscegenation

with repeated reference to Bianca as “dark-skinned” and “wild” (Dutt 62, 65). Bianca suffers a mental breakdown although she is nursed back to health by her father and love interest. Although Dutt does have a forebear in Brontë, her position as an Indian woman writer dealing with this subject matter is uncharted territory.

Govin Chunder, a champion of his daughter’s genius, was reluctant to promote *Bianca* as a finished work, perhaps due to his literary standards of what a polished work should look like but also possibly because in this novel, the autobiographical parallels and the slippage to the surface of “subversive impulses” are things he intuited.

In *Bianca*, Toru Dutt creates a fantasy projection of a life she desires—a hyperreal-- in which the displacement felt by the author due to her multiple allegiances is expressed and attempted to be resolved. In the author’s life, this uncertainty as to her position is addressed by her friend, Mary Martin who corrected her for her use of the word ‘native’ in a letter dated in 1876, to which Dutt replied, “the reproof is just, and I stand corrected” (Das 131). It is as though Dutt viewed India through the lens of a European and had to be reminded that she was after all, Indian. In the novel, Dutt attempts to resolve this dual identity by creating a Spanish heroine who is neither Indian nor English. She is a dark, olive complexioned girl, teetering on the brink of acceptable racial type:

> Her face was not quite oval; her forehead was low; her lips were full, sensitive and mobile; her colour was dark. Have you ever see an Italian peasant girl? When she blushed or was excited, the colour mounted warm and deep to her pale olive cheek; she was beautiful then. Her dark brown eyes – “Just like

> Keeper's" (the dog's), her father would say smiling - were large and full. In fact, this pair of eyes and her long, black curls were her only points of beauty. (Dutt 38)

Even though Bianca's father, Alonzo Garcia, had an English mother, he is still called "a foreign gentleman residing in England" (33). Bianca, whose mother was English, is the Spanish maiden. Her friend, Maggie Moore wonders if Bianca's father has "Moorish blood in his veins" and asks, "how do you know English so well, Bianca?" (59) Although Bianca has never stepped foot on soil other than England's, her command of the language is questioned, echoing Dutt's own divided linguistic allegiances and the sense amongst Bengali *bhadralok* (bourgeoisie) society that English was also their language. Lady Moore, who is terrified that her son will marry Bianca and pollute their aristocratic English purity, asks him, "And you like a sooty complexion, a snub nose, a low forehead, and a girl without a penny?" (67). She is clearly not seen as an equal, her power being further diminished by her straitened circumstances. Bianca's racial difference and Lady Moore's perception of her as inferior in class, reflects the racism present in Victorian England.

In Debjani Banerjee's introduction to her thesis, "Nationalist and feminist identities: Moments of confrontation and complicity in postcolonial fiction and film", she points to this imaginative wiping away of Indianness:

> This split is enacted in tortuous ways in the nineteenth century writing of Toru Dutt; in her two novels the national identity of the author is completely eschewed and supplanted by French and Spanish protagonists . . . This inflection

> of the autobiographical elements points to the woman writer's inability to represent herself within nationalist paradigms within the colonial context. Her Indianness, an inextricable part of her identification with the colonized, is a narratorial absence that is covered over by "other," more distanced presences." (72-73)

It seems arbitrary of Banerjee to assume that Dutt is obligated to represent Indianness as a writer, especially if the author herself feels some kinship with the colonizer. It is not so much a case of eschewing Indianness as using "more distanced presences" to perform an act of ventriloquism that speaks to Dutt's own conflicted feelings about Indianness. Bianca's mixed heritage appears to be an identification with both colonizer and colonized.

While appropriating Spanishness, Dutt does not attempt to create an authentic Spanish identity—when Alonzo loses his temper, he speaks in French, one more fragmentation of the refugee who does not know who he is or rather he knows who he is not—not English. Rather, Dutt paints "otherness" in broad strokes that mirror and internalize the colonizer's view of the other. Lord Moore sees Bianca as a "wild Spanish girl" who loves him with "all the fire and glow of her warm Southern blood" (62-63). Her pride is seen as "natural and innate" (63). So while Dutt attempts to elude the singular narrative of "native" other, "...the conflicted terrain marked by colonial encounter and crystallizing discourses of nationhood continues to encroach upon the formation of the text even when it is ostensibly distanced from the author's national identity" (Banerjee 79). Banerjee goes on to conflate Alonzo Garcia with the "native country" and the white

aristocrat, Lord Moore, with the colonizing power (76). Bianca's divided loyalty to her own father and to her love-interest is characteristic of Dutt's conflicted loyalties and her identification of both India and England as "home."

The romance is complicated by the inter-racial context but also because as Meenakshi Mukherjee states in *Realism and Reality,* "Romantic love could only be illicit, involving either a widow or a courtesan—since only these categories of women were without legal 'proprietors' and thus seemed to embody a certain amount of unharnessed sexual energy" (80). Romantic love necessitates the presence of sexual desire which is not supposed to exist in "good women." The dual taboo of inter-racial love and romantic love itself is highlighted when Bianca daydreams, reciting a fragment from Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha:" She was thinking of a hunter,/From another tribe and country,/Young and tall and very handsome…" (Dutt 53). Minnehaha becomes a literary double for Bianca. Lord Moore is literally from "another tribe and country" and a mate who must first seek Bianca's father's approval like the young Hiawatha. Before the reverie continues, she censors herself because he is a "lord of Burleigh" and she is no "village maiden" and then further degrading herself: "neither am I pretty" (53). Minnehaha becomes a distanced and distorted presence for Bianca. Bianca can not see herself sharing the same fate as the "village maiden." After going to bed, she gets up because she has not prayed, calling herself very "wicked," kneels down and prays for "forgiveness and peace" (53). For a young woman to harbor romantic, nascent sexual thoughts are indeed "wicked" and what Dutt is expressing is the conflict between Longfellow's message of romantic love and the dual prohibition on a woman's sexuality

by both Victorian mores and the restrictions placed on sexuality by a particular upper-class Hindu society. For a woman of this social class to harbor thoughts of free choice or desires that were uncontrollable, is viewed as destabilizing to the status quo that uses women as collateral between men making marriage alliances. Bianca recognizes this when she rejects her sister's lover, Walter Ingram's offer of marriage. She sees clearly that the only reason he has proposed is because of his "obligations to Papa" and she wants no part of the deal (47). She tells her father about the incident and he congratulates her, saying, "You did well, child" (50). Bianca is her father's companion in his loneliness and passing her on to another man holds no material benefit to the father.

When Lord Moore kisses Bianca in a fit of passion, which she feels as "unutterable bliss," her passion is also "mingled with pain" (76). She is overcome with guilt and confides the "great sin" to her father (76). To stay within acceptable social norms, Bianca must necessarily feel guilt for transgression (although we wonder if Lord Moore suffers the same burden). Her confession follows the complex articulation of desire which characterizes the Catholic confessional. Foucault describes the purpose of confession:

> "But after all, the Christian pastoral also sought to produce specific effects on desire, by the mere fact of transforming it—fully and deliberately into discourse: effects of mastery and detachment, to be sure, but also an effect of spiritual reconversion, of turning back to God, a physical effect of blissful suffering from feeling in one's body the pangs of temptation and the love that resists it." (Foucault 49)

Foucault is tracing an ideal of renunciation in Christianity that goes all the way back to Saint Augustine who was in turn influenced by the Stoics. The pleasurable aspects of physical desire are renounced and instead it is viewed as the source of human suffering. In overcoming our physical desires, we are able to transcend suffering. The Catholic confessional by turning physical desire into discourse, allows the penitent to turn this desire into spiritual desire for union with God. Logos or the "word" becomes the path to salvation. Interestingly, this central concept of early Christian and then Catholic thought resonates with the Hindu ideal of renunciation of the physical in order to achieve moksha (salvation). Bianca, as a Catholic, struggles to detach herself from her physical desire by confessing it to her father.

Throughout the novel, Bianca wishes to rid herself of her physical body by wanting to die: "Oh, she longed to go and lay herself down on the newly made grave and die there" (35). Her sister, Inez, achieves sainthood because she is no longer plagued by the body. At Inez's funeral, the Reverend Smith says, "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Dutt 34). The body must be destroyed before it can be made whole again without original sin (sexual desire). Christianity's renunciation of the flesh in order to be made whole again also resonates with Indian nationalist's denial of the female body in order to promote a feminine spiritual ideal, another hyperreal--an idea without a body. When the real woman fails at achieving this ideal, self-abnegation follows. The "blissful suffering" is the pain of suppressed desire. Bianca's bliss at the touch of another human being, a desire for intimacy, is highlighted by the lack of it in her life.

She gives of herself: “no mother could have been a better nurse than young Bianca was,” providing care to her sister before death and in her caring for her father, yet when she desires this care for herself, she sees herself as undeserving (39). A girl like Inez is wholly deserving of that love because she embodies a feminine ideal: “Inez wants to be looked after. She is so loving. No wonder he *(her father)* loves her best. I should not be jealous; I am strong. I can take care of myself” (39). A meek, helpless woman is rewarded, a strong independent one is not. When Bianca’s father finally does put his hand on her shoulder, she feels “[A] thrill of unknown pleasure” (38). Bianca’s “thrill” in response to any touch, be it from her father, a lover, or a child (which I shall momentarily explore) is somehow illicit, her self-denial being so extreme. While Alonzo Garcia’s possessiveness of his daughter and his view of her as in many ways his equal puts her almost in the position of a being a wife, I do not see her response as incestuous so much as a result of repressed longing for physical touch.

In fact, any desire for physical contact is marked by secrecy and when discovered, is met with disapproval. Lord Moore has a four-year old brother, born after his father’s death. Little Willie is excessively fond of Bianca and when Bianca visits the family, for Lord Moore’s sister, Maggie, is her friend, the little boy runs to Bianca and she embraces him. After some time, Willie sighs which “meant a desire for a kiss from Bianca. Now that nobody was looking, Bianca kissed the smooth round cheek, that was pressed close against hers” (57). The maternal physical urges that Bianca feels are somehow taboo and she must kiss the child when “nobody is looking,” partly because Lady Moore disapproves of the “sooty” complexioned girl who is racially inferior, and as

a Spanish Catholic, potentially degenerate. However, Bianca herself feels the need to be secretive which reflects her own confusion about physical pleasure.

When Lord Moore, attempts to complement her on her motherly instincts with, "You are very fond of children, Miss Garcia," Bianca again denies this part of herself: "Not at all. Indeed, not of any, except Will. Children do not seem to like me very much. I have lived so lonely with only my father for a companion that I do not know how to make children love me" (61). It is interesting that the self-image that Bianca has constructed for herself is not always in keeping with the reality. It is as though; Bianca once again sees herself as undeserving of love itself. In her loyalty to her father, she is unable to see herself as anything but a daughter, certainly not a mother figure.

Bianca's physicality is met with disapproval from her father. On a visit with his older brother, Little Willie draws Bianca into a spontaneous show of affection:

> She rose and held him up in her arms. He plucked the golden bunches of laburnums with his sturdy little fingers; then laughing, he thrust them into her hair. She laughed, and gaining new ardour, he plucked more and more of the "dropping gold" and thrust them within her raven locks. His two little hands were vigorously at work; when lo! The comb dropped off and her jet-black, wavy locks fell all loose on her shoulders and down to her girdle." (72)

The scene is redolent with the imagery of physicality—the female-shaped flower is "thrust" into her hair, and her hair, so evocative of female sexuality, is freed by the child's work. When her father walks out with Lord Moore, he is shocked by her "wildness" and poor Bianca responds, "Will did it, father, unintentionally," and she

answers “penitently” (73). She is placed in the Catholic confessional as a penitent, and is forced to confess to the “authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile…” (Foucault 134). Alonzo Garcia asks her to “bind it up” and she is fully aware of her father’s judgment--“that she was playing a little of the coquette before Lord Moore” (Dutt 73). In this scene, Bianca is also the Hindu goddess Kali whose loose hair represents uncontrolled female energy. The demand to control her hair is an attempt to turn her into the domesticated and clothed female goddess, Gauri and into the asexual child whose physicality is tightly monitored by the parent and society.

Debjani Banerjee notes that “[T]he conflictual pressures of the figures represented by the father and Lord Moore provokes self-abnegation at the level of desires that can only translate into physical suffering” (86). Bianca finally suffers a psycho-physical break which is a result of this “binding” by her father on the one hand and the impossibility of extinguishing her own physicality on the other. Her illness is a symptom of the constant self-denial and the failure of the ego to withstand the suppression upon the boundaries of selfhood which so characterizes women’s writing of the nineteenth century. When Bianca declares her love for Lord Moore to her father, Alonzo chides Bianca for showing emotion: “The servants mustn’t see you thus distressed. What will they think?” (78) He is more concerned that others, including Lord Moore’s mother, will see him as an opportunist, rather than considering his daughter’s own happiness. He would rather keep her as a child, then let her “love another man better than me!” (80). Bianca’s response parallels Ophelia’s response to her father,

Polonius, in *Hamlet* (Dutt mentions in a letter that she had seen the play in London). In her own version of "I shall obey, my lord," she says, "I will not marry him. I wish your peace and happiness above all things" (80). Like Ophelia, Bianca feels the conflicting loyalties towards her lover and her father. She is willing to put her father's needs above her own. And like Ophelia, Bianca descends into madness, babbling incoherent and cryptic thoughts:

> Poor Pussy, Your little Kitty has been given away. You are sorry, so am I, Puss; that's right. Pussy, kiss the cross. He says that a sparrow does not fall to the ground without His knowledge. Surely He will pity you, Puss; and make you soon forget your little one...Kitty will be happy and contented in her new home." (95)

The imaginary "poor pussy" is soothed by Bianca, who identifies with her loss. The pussy is mourning the loss of a kitten and similarly Bianca is also dealing with the loss of her sister but also, like Ophelia, is mourning her loss of the passage towards womanhood--as a lover and a mother. In alluding to Hamlet when he is finally resigned to his fate--"there is special providence in the fall of a sparrow," Bianca seems ready to face the only other alternative to consummating life itself—death. She is asking for release from the pain, by asking God for forgetfulness and what is not madness but a form of forgetting? When her father enters her room, she says, "*j'avais commis quelque faute, n'est-ce pas? Qu'etait-ce? Je ne m'en souviens pas*" (86). She must bury her painful memories by not remembering that she has done something "wrong" or quite simply she can not remember because she has done nothing wrong but is punished nonetheless.

Bianca's illness is the result of extreme suppression of her own desires and the result of self-denial. Yet madness offers Bianca another simulacrum, another mirage identity to obfuscate those desires for an identity that is self-determined. The "madwoman" although not often the heroine in women's novels, becomes "in some sense the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage" (Gilbert and Gubar 78). In her "sane" musings Bianca creates a literary alter-ego in Minnehaha who is wooed by the brave warrior, Hiawatha. When Bianca is sick, her literary doubles become more subversive and become more politically charged. Although Bianca's sexuality is constrained, her literary kin, Ophelia, is excused of vulgarity and speaking of sex:

> Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day,
> All in the morning betime,
> And I a maid at your window,
> To be your Valentine.
> Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,
> And dupped the chamber door. Let in the maid that out a maid
> Never departed more.
>
> (Shakespeare, IV.V.46-55)

In madness, Ophelia does not have to obey and expresses the loss of her own agency vis à vis, control over her own sexuality. Bianca, who is denied the ability to articulate her sexuality (except to relinquish it as a penitent), is thus given a voice to do so by summoning Ophelia.

In her delirious ramblings, it is significant that Bianca recites a passage from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem, "The Princess." Although Dutt does not cite Tennyson as the author of her recitation, in a letter to Mary Martin, dated February 18, 1877, Dutt tells Martin that Tennyson's "Idylls" and the "Princess," "will be ever favourites with me" (Das 267). In reciting this passage, Bianca or the author herself is expressing an affinity with Tennyson's heroine: the strong woman who is seen as manly, the educated Princess Ida who stands like a statue of Pallas, the female who desires a companionate marriage, who defies her father and the patriarchy and is willing to wage war to keep her freedom. Princess Ida offers a female ideal of strength and resistance.

Referencing her own unmarried state, Dutt mocks her own culture's practice of child-marriage, writing to Martin that "Marriage, you must know, is a great thing with the Hindus. An unmarried girl of fifteen is never heard of in our country" (Das 152). Princess Ida is betrothed to the prince of a neighboring kingdom at the age of eight. When the children grow up, the Prince's father sends his emissaries to the princess' father's court and her father, King Gama, gives them this answer: "He said there was a compact; that was true:/ But then she had a will; was he to blame?/ And maiden fancies; loved to live alone/Among her women; certain, would not wed" (Tennyson). Now Ida, "prophesying change/ Beyond all reason" asks her father for a boon and sets off to set up an all female university with her two female mentors, Psyche and Blanche. The Western princess' erudition and yearning for freedom is echoed in Dutt's own poem, "Savitri:" In those far off primeval days/ Fair India's daughters were not pent/ In closed zenanas./ On her ways/ Savitri at her pleasure went/ Whither she chose … And so

she wandered where she pleased/ In boyish freedom. Happy time! (Dutt as qtd. in Brinks 45). Savitri, as Ellen Brinks notes, is educated by "hermit sages" and her father allows her to choose her own husband, Satyavam (45). Savitri, with her keen intelligence is able to convince the god of death, Yama, to return her husband to life. Princess Ida is granted "boyish freedom" by her father. She is both erudite and militaristic, winning the battle against the prince's father with her brother's help. Ida assumes a masculinized role. Her suitor, the prince, is feminized and weak and suffers from from an ancient curse, an illness which makes him the "shadow of a dream." Ironically, Bianca evokes the Princess when she is least able to choose for herself; like Ida her intelligence does not eventually buy her freedom. Ida's castle is attacked by the prince's father who believes that women are creatures to be conquered: *"*Man is the hunter; woman is his game:/ The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,/ We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;/ They love us for it, and we ride them down./ Wheedling and siding with them!" (Tennyson). Ida must call a truce and allows the wounded men into her castle to be nursed back to health, reinforcing women's roles as nurturers. Bianca, in turn, is conquered, not by an army of men, but by the ever-constant restraints on her will by her father who in turn is the emissary of a patriarchal hegemony. Despite the fact that the men are hostile to Ida, she must reenter a patriarchal world and enact more gender appropriate behavior.

When Bianca recites Tennyson's verse, she chooses a passage that comes after Ida has allowed the ailing prince to be carried into her deepest chamber. Ida feels that her sanctuary has been "violated" but feels a sense of inevitability:

Ask me no more, the moon may draw the sea,

The clouds may stoop from heaven and take the shape

From fold to fold of mountain or of cape,

Yet ah! Too fond when I have answered thee –

Ask me no more!

Ask me no more; they fate and mine are sealed

Alas! My lord – so it is – listen! She said sadly.

I strove against the stream and all in vain

Let the great river bear me to the main!

No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield

Ask me no more! (Dutt 88)

The repetition of "Ask me no more" sets a beseeching tone, that although Ida accepts the inevitability of mortality and fate in the words, "Let the great river bear me to the main," she begs to let some inner part of herself be kept intact, even if her sanctuary has been violated. Given Bianca's fragile mental state, it is as though she too is asking for a part of herself not to be surrendered. Ida's battlements become a figurative representation of her psychological boundaries that when under attack are compromised. Similarly, Bianca's illness is a result of her own boundaries being collapsed as she feels the constant pressure to put her father's needs over her own. "Ask me no more" becomes a plea to Lord Moore and/or her father to let Bianca retain some of her own will and spirit.

Although Ida is moved by compassion to help the prince, she senses that there is

something she has lost: “But Sadness on the soul of Ida fell,/ And hatred of her weakness, bent with shame” (Tennyson). Ida’s rebellion against a misogynistic society is “all in vain” and she acknowledges her vulnerability (“for at a touch I yield”). She bends in womanly compassion and is deeply ambivalent about it. Bianca is proud of the fact that she is “as good as a son” (39) to her father but is ashamed for being womanly and needing affection.

Interestingly, there are other figures in “The Princess” who parallel Bianca. The prince is feminized in the poem as a love-sick, sickly man who suffers his father’s disapproval for his equal views of women. Like Bianca, the prince falls ill, struggling between life and death and like Lord Moore, who sits beside the delirious Bianca, Princess Ida sits by the prince. Ida bends down to kiss the prince in a reversal of gender roles but feels “noble shame,” while Lord Moore kisses Bianca but feels no embarrassment. As the prince finally turns a corner, he promises Ida a new world in which “the woman’s cause is man’s: they rise or sink/ Together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free” and offers a companionate marriage which is also Bianca’s wish. Both *Bianca* and “The Princess” never reach closure or a sealing of the bond between the two sets of lovers. In the poem, we hear the prince’s plea to Ida to “Yield thyself up … Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust to me” but we do not hear Ida’s answer and even though in the frame narrative that follows, Walter Vivian says, “I wish she had not yielded!” we are never sure if the princess does agree or not, leaving her freedom to choose intact.

In *Bianca*, our heroine begins to recover and when, with her father’s blessing,

Lord Moore proposes, Bianca too avoids speaking, and "she took his hand and pressed her lips on it" (105). Lord Moore plans to take her far way from his mother's disapproving eyes to live in 'Montague House' in Wales, thus transferring his allegiance to his wife and agreeing to bring her father with them. Bianca is relieved of the guilt of abandoning her father and she may continue to nurture her father as she has in the past, thus suggesting that that she does not have to let go of her prior life and loyalties because of marriage.

Before the close of the novel, we glimpse what the Moore marriage might look like. When they encounter a shady figure from her family's past, Mr. Owen, she tells him: "We broke off all connection with you, Mr. Owen, long ago. I do not wish to renew it" (117). When Lord Moore tells her that Mr. Owen is her cousin, Bianca, apologizes, asking, "Will my lord pardon me?" (117) but she does not change her mind about Mr. Owen, not feeling the need to give up her opinions to please her husband. As they walk back to her father's house, "he accompanied her part of the way, but she sent him back" (118). Her subservience as a daughter or as a beloved may be the source or her walking part of the way home, splitting the territory of her allegiance between the two men in her life. Alternately, the decision to walk part of the way alone shows Bianca's continued independence; this is the same character who early in the novel, mentions that she carries a little pistol in her cloak. She is capable of taking care of herself.

In the last chapter of the novel, Lord Moore is headed to Sevastopol to fight in the Crimean War as "England required her sons to their duty" (119). He puts a small ring on Bianca's marriage finger and his last words are, "You will wear that for my sake,

darling, and if I never return –" (119). Given that the novel was considered incomplete by Dutt's father when he discovered it, why did Toru Dutt end the novel here? Debjani Banerjee argues that "the novel cannot resolve the contradictions that constitute the palimpsests underlying the romantic theme" and that concerning a relationship between a white man and Indian (or Spanish "other" in this case), Dutt is "unable to articulate the possibility" (78). In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, marriages between British officers of the Company and Indian women were not uncommon. With the rise of Victorian Evangelism, the practice became less common and was virtually unheard of by the mid-eighteenth century (Dalrymple). The lighter skinned offspring of these marriages were often passed of as English and sent back to England while the darker skinned children remained in India. Anglo-Indians became ostracized for being classless on the Indian side and racially inferior on the British side. As a result of this intolerance, Anglo-Indians would often try to pass as Portuguese or Spanish, raising the question of Bianca's own racial origins (especially because we know her mother was English). In upper-class Hindu families in particular, interracial marriages were taboo because it was assumed that only lower-class women would be willing to mix with British men. Respectable, upper-class women would not mix with men outside the family, let alone foreign men. So the lack of closure, if we are to following Banerjee's reasoning, could be more a result of the taboo of such racial mixing and the anxieties about racial purity raised on both sides of the divide. Bianca's racial ambiguity also suggests a level commingling of the two cultures that had gone underground by the time Dutt wrote this novel.

I would also argue that Dutt, by refusing to provide closure to the romance, Bianca, like Princess Ida, is also exercising her right to choose. Although, it might be inevitable that both heroines become wives, their silence becomes a site of resistance. There is no simplistic choice here—they may voluntarily choose love but in their silence, retain that part of themselves that is still free to choose. In her life, Dutt attempted to navigate between two cultures, between her pride in being Indian and her genuine identification with English culture. *Bianca*, the romance between the Spanish maiden and the English lord, is an attempt to reconcile Englishness with otherness.

Chapter III

Daughters and Wives in *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*

Krupabai Satthianadhan (1862-1894), author of *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*, was no stranger to living in two worlds. Her existence seemed marked by duality. She was educated by Western missionaries, spoke English, and was a Christian. But she was also a patriotic Indian, spoke Marathi and came from a well-respected Brahmin family. As is the case with so many other Indian writers writing in English, duality is not marked by polarity but rather by a sense of hybridity, with multiple allegiances imbricated upon each other, at times harmonizing and at other times conflictual.

In Toru Dutt*'s* novel, *Bianca,* we get the sense that Dutt was struggling to form an identity through her writing. The act of writing was in some ways a sublimation, in which Dutt was able to project and create an identity for herself through her art. In Satthianadhan's autobiographical novel, *Saguna* (1893), she is clear as to who she is in terms of being a Christian, a "New Woman," and very much an Indian. In *Saguna,* she writes of an encounter with a young man who has just returned from studies in England. When he refers to England as "home," the young author is outraged and reprimands him: "Surely that is not your home. Your home is here. What will the old people say to their only son's claiming as his home the home of others?" ((Satthianadhan qtd. In Mund, "The Portrait of an Indian Lady")

Satthianadhan was equally critical of European missionaries who came to India in the name of Christ and held racist views towards Indians because they believed Indians converted to Christianity for material gain not because of "spiritual convictions" (Singh 54). When Satthianadhan was fourteen, she was sent to live with two European missionaries. In her conversation with one of the women, Miss Roberts, she chastises the missionary for having a low opinion of the one local woman: "What do you think of us? We are the real aristocrats of this place… You are middle-class people. She is a Brahmin and only takes money from the mission because she is poor. She is no servant. In your country, you are no Brahmins. You are shudras." (Satthianadhan qtd. In Mund, "The Portrait of an Indian Lady"). Satthianadhan turns the hierarchical thinking of the colonizer on its head and reminds the European of India's own hierarchy which viewed Europeans as untouchables. One form of cruel hierarchy replaces another form of cruel hierarchy in this conversation.

Satthianadhan's novels inhabit a liminal space between Western and Indian discourse, addressing both an English readership and contributing to the prevalent discourse of the time on social reform for India's women. In the "Introductory Memoir" to *Kamala*, written by a Mrs. Grigg, an acquaintance of the author and possibly the wife of a British official, we are told that her majesty, the Queen Empress, "had recently accepted a copy of "Saguna" and was graciously pleased to request that any other work by the authoress should be sent to her" (i). Satthianadhan's writings are supposedly "better known to English than to Indian readers" (i) and she grants the English reader access to a hidden world: "we are admitted into the secrets of an Indian household--the

difficulties and the sorrows of a Hindu wife and mother" (xxix). The novel resists being "a voyeuristic glimpse into a *zenana* or a record of disappearance" because of the deep sensitivity and realism by which she draws Kamala's psychological state (Brinks 149). While Grigg evokes Orientalist tropes of India as other-worldly and a land of mystery: "we rise from its perusal to shake off the dream-like feeling of living another life and breathing another atmosphere" (xxix), Satthianadhan describes the landscape with an intimacy that is romantic in the same way that Wordworth's Lake District is romantic, not as a native informant painting an exotic and mythologized landscape for a Western audience.

That is not to say that Satthianadhan is unaware of her Western audience. The flat titles of both her novels suggest a Western readership- -*Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* and *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life.* In the former title, the use of the word "native" is self-conscious and implies that the author is viewing herself through the perspective of a Western reader. The title of her second novel, *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*, presents itself as a window into Indian life. This is further suggested by the opening lines of Kamala: "India may not be a perfect paradise, yet there are in it spots of surpassing beauty and grandeur" (Satthianadhan 1). With this line, a veil is drawn on India and we prepare to enter the life of a Hindu.

Although viewed by Europeans (and herself) as an Indian lady, Satthianadhan was a Christian and thus earned a further minority status in Indian society. This of course stems from the conservative nationalists in the nineteenth century attempt to align the Indian nation as synonymous with Hinduism. India has for much of its history

been host to a multitude of religions and although it is currently the world's largest secular democracy, the will of the majority, that is Hindus, has at different points in history asserted itself. Hindus as well as Muslims and Sikhs have been wary of Christian evangelism especially because the Christians who proselytized in the later part of the nineteenth century, also happened to be arm in arm with the colonizers. However, the critical reception of *Kamala* in India was mostly positive. *The Madras Mail* stated, "We took up the book with a preconceived prejudice that the daughter of Christian converts was the last person fitted to give a true picture of the life of a Brahmin household. We laid it down agreeably disappointed" (as quoted in Brinks, "Gendered Spaces and Conjugal Reform," 62). The reason for this is likely because there is no proselytizing in the novel and the realism of the novel is fairly indicative of Brahmin Hindu life. Although Satthianadhan was a Christian, her family had only recently converted and her ethos was that of a Brahmin family. This was not foreign territory for her.

Grigg offers Satthianadhan the "highest praise" that can be given to an Indian writer: "[N]o novelist or story-teller in Southern India, or, as far as I know, in India has achieved so much, either as regards a mastery over our language or in an absolute freedom from imitation or book making" (xxxv). Echoing Raja Rao's choice to write in English but to do so in a way that conveys an Indian perspective, Satthianadhan's English writing conveys an "emotional makeup" that can only be Indian. Also, even as Satthianadhan was influenced by intellectual Christian values, by way of ending child marriage, encouraging companionate marriages, and endorsing the education of

women, her ideas on social reform are profoundly humanistic, not simply European in origin.

Indian writer and critic, Indrani Sen, points out that "in many cases female negotiations with 'colonial modernity' were mediated through interactions with white women, especially with missionaries and schoolteachers" (2). Satthianadhan was in fact sent to live with missionaries, then sent to a mission school for girls where she did meet a sympathetic American woman doctor who encouraged her towards a career in medicine. Satthianadhan was supposed to go to England to study but a male missionary deemed she was constitutionally too weak for such a journey. She did end up being the first woman to be admitted to Madras Medical College and while she was not uncritical of European missionaries, there were those that encouraged her aspirations.

Western women such as Mary Carpenter were actively involved in bringing the concerns of the nascent women's movement from the West to India. Many Indian women of the period, such as Ramabai Ranade and Cornelia Sorabji, especially in the Bombay Presidency, campaigned to end child marriage and the mistreatment of widows. According to Ellen Brinks, Satthianadhan's essay, "Female Education," appearing in *Indian* magazine (the journal of the Indian National Association), "linked India's regeneration with the liberation of its women" (150). Adopting Hindu reformist rhetoric, she invoked "far more liberal and generous ideas" of the ancient Hindus, who valued women's conjugal rights, higher learning, and contribution to public discourse. She attributed women's degradation to the "ascendancy of priestly power" and referred in particular to women's loss of the right to choose their own spouse, enforced gender

inequalities, and their lack of education" (Satthianadhan as qtd. In Brinks, 150). Satthianadhan did have a companionate marriage with Samuel, son of her guardian, Reverend W.T. Satthianadhan, who she met when she was a student in Madras. Although she traveled to where her husband was stationed (mainly in the hill-stations of the Nilgiris), he encouraged her to write. When Satthianadhan stricken by tuberculosis, struggled to finish *Kamala,* she dictated the rest of the novel to her husband.

Kamala was published only three years after the Age of Consent Act of 1891 was passed. It was first serialized in *Madras Christian College Magazine* and was then published by Srinivasa Varadchari Publishing House in 1895 posthumously and is a direct critique of those who opposed the law. The Act did not raise the legal marriageable age but raised the age at which an individual could consent to sexual intercourse from ten to twelve years of age. There was a strong conservative Hindu reaction against the Act and the State was accused of interfering with Hindu law, even though as Brinks maintains "the *smritis* and *srutis* (canons of Hindu religious scripture) did not authorize child marriage" (149). To protest against this reaction, many Indian women "formed committees, sent petitions to Queen Victoria, held meetings and passed differing resolutions on aspects of the bill" (Brinks 150). Women's reform was adopted by the British as a locus for "civilizing" India. Spivak sees this as "white men are saving brown women from brown men," thus rendering Indian women voiceless (296). In issues concerning Indian women such as child marriage, women's education, and sati, British policy was seen as undermining the ability of Indian men to govern themselves, or treat their women justly, thus justifying British rule as a necessity. However, as I argue in this

study, writers like Pandita Ramabai and Krupabai Satthianadhan cannot be essentialized as complicit with the imperial machine. Their own resistance forms a valid part of nineteenth- century discourse on the plight of the upper caste Indian woman in particular. The narrative of *Kamala*, written three years after the Age of Consent Act was passed was a significant contribution to this debate. Kamala, a young child-bride, shows how the girl is effectively robbed of her childhood, her education, and any respect in the Hindu extended family system.

At the heart of the novel is the claim that "in most cultures, social conformity has always been more obligatory for a woman than for a man, her identity generally constructed—by herself as much as by others—in terms of her relationship with men, as daughter, wife, mother or widow" (Mukherjee, *Perishable Empire* 40). Each stage of Kamala's life is defined and dictated by her relation to others. Satthianadhan claims that without these relational roles, the Hindu woman has no identity and underscores the precariousness of such a position. How then do women in the novel maintain their place in the social order while fulfilling Satthianadhan's reformist agenda to raise the status of women in upper caste Hindu society? Although a Brahmin, Kamala is an outsider when she first enters her husband's household. With no mother as a traditional role model and with a *sanyasi* father who has raised her to wander freely through nature and play with *sudra* children in the hills, Kamala is unaware of the unspoken boundaries that dictate a daughter-in-law's behavior that place her at the bottom of the family. According to Meenakshi Mukherhee, "[S]he does not fit the assumptions of patriarchy that women should be either passive objects of pleasure and convenience, or creatures

intriguing for domestic power. How can such odd women be socially integrated? This has been the question at the heart of many female bildungsromans in different cultures" (*Perishable Empire* 76). But Kamala is no iconoclast and in her innocence, is meek and compliant. Because she fails to conform, she is punished by her in-laws. Her initiation into womanhood is marked by pain and disappointment.

Kamala's father knows what will happen to his daughter when he tells her she is to be married:

> "It was arranged some time ago. The visitors came to see you more than me. I have had a great struggle, but it is all over. Your father-in-law to be is a pundit well known to me. His wife was here this evening. Are you satisfied my girl?" There was a ring of pain in his voice." (Satthianadhan 17)

Her father is helpless under "the weight of customary practices" that mandate that a girl-child is viewed only as a future wife. The "ring of pain in his voice" is caused by the knowledge that "living or dead she was henceforth the wife and the property of the man whoever he might be" (Satthianadhan 26). It is not even important that her father utter the names of the family he is giving his daughter to. Her father-in-law is a "pundit" which means he is of a similar class and since he is "well known to me," this is meant to offer Kamala some solace that this might be a family she can adapt to and perhaps find a surrogate family. With the use of the phrase, "whoever he might be be," Satthianadhan suggests an arbitrariness in the social order which pronounces a girl to be her husband's property, "whoever" he may be. Also the wife is property, "living or dead," which underscores the utter lack of freedom Kamala can expect when she is

married. “Living or dead” also foreshadows Kamala’s adherence to the belief that even after death, she must remain the dutiful and loyal wife.

It appears that although her father has kept her protected from society and its laws up in her hilltop abode, he knows that it is inescapable that Kamala literally descend to the “petty lives” and live “amongst the strangers of the city” (19). He tells her, “You must go and be like other girls, toil for your own food and be at the mercy of others” (17). The words echo the Biblical expulsion from Eden where God tells Adam that he will have to “toil” for his own food. Though, through no fault of her own, Kamala is expelled from her Eden.

As a bildungsroman, we first meet Kamala as a child and it is this necessary delineation between child and adult woman by which we can fully understand the gravity of her fall from innocence to suffering. Ruby Lal, in “Recasting the Women’s Question,” speaks of how in Hindu patriarchal discourse, the “girl-child/woman/mother is collapsed into one compound figure” (324), compounded by the practice of child-marriage. Although in such a practice, “the girl is merely the shadow of a woman” (325), Satthianadhan begins the narrative with Kamala as very much a child, who waits for the return of her *sanyasi* father. We first meet the young Kamala in the midst of nature which is conflated with innocence, “on a little hillock . . . her face resting on her hand, and a weary expression in her eyes . . . She is looking out over the hills, wondering where her father, an old Brahmin recluse, might be. She remembers going out to meet him returning on many occasions, riding on his back and wondering if the wind, “her friend and play-fellow” or her “cross but well-meaning ayah were waiting for

her" (Satthianadhan 2-3). As a child, she still rides on her father's back and although the scene evokes the solitude of the waiting child, she is sure he will return as he has on "many occasions" (3). She is not alone, nature itself is a companionate spirit with the wind being her "play-fellow" and the maternal presence of her ayah waiting at home for her.

Satthianadhan delineates the natural realm of the hills as positive and town-life down in the plains as negative. In the novel, nature is a space for women to go to be free of the rules and discipline that controls them in the town. Also in nature, Kamala encounters the spiritual. The religious awe that Kamala is able to experience in nature and also the fact that she often feels the presence of her deceased mother in natural spaces, offer the young girl comfort in her hard life. Unlike her father who is old and a man, Kamala cannot choose the life of a *sanyasi* and retreat to the forest. Her fate and her duty are always to be tied to her husband and his family but the succor that nature offers her, sustains her.

While both physical and spiritual mothering are vital to the life of the community, Ellen Brinks asserts that "within Hindu reformist discussions of child-marriage, this bond is something that is not focused on, reflecting social structures that minimize its significance" (156). Both *Kamala* and *Bianca* are similar in that that their mothers are deceased and they have strong relationships with their fathers. But in *Kamala*, there is a mother-daughter shadow narrative, a ghostly presence that surfaces despite the primary familial bond being between Kamala and her living father. Perhaps the protection offered by the dead mother is what allows Kamala to fulfill her

unconscious needs (at least partially) and save her from breaking under the psychic strain caused by the emotional deprivation she encounters in her husband's household. Kamala is saved from despair by both her own mother and later in the novel, by the ties to her own child.

Although Kamala's mother is dead, she maintains her influence on the girl's life—through the stories her father tells her about her mother, through nature, by being a role model for learning, and finally for leaving her with a level of financial independence. As a young child, "the picture of a fair tall lady with large sad eyes often came to her in her dreams, and she remembered a time when she was fondled and petted and called sweet names." Her mother's image comes to her in dreams and in "the starlit evenings would come back to her." When entering sleep, "she felt the sweet presence of someone near her" (Satthianadhan 5). In a dream state, Kamala can access a sense of unity with the mother that she is not able to access while awake.

In nature, Kamala feels free and Satthianadhan associates "wild places with the feminine" (Brinks 156). Also the "starlit evenings" symbolize Kamala's union with God, echoing Satthianadhan's own relating of numinous experiences with nature. In *Saguna,* Satthianadhan speaks of a walk taken with her older brother, Bhasker, in which we see her describe nature as sublime:

> As we ascended the hill in front of our house we seemed to be leaving the world, and piercing the region of the unknown, so thick was the mist around us, and when we reached the highest point we were startled by the dim majesty and grandeur that burst upon us. We seemed to be looking down upon mortals

> below in another world. The shadowy cloudland, dark and gloomy, like a large bird with spreading wings, hovered overhead and the great world, sleeping in mist, lay below in its purity and whiteness like a huge sea stretched at our feet. It was the silence of eternity linked to the world for a moment. A soft starry dreamland light enwrapt and overspread all. Above, the neighboring peaks, distant and dark, mysteriously loomed like fingers pointing to heaven. The strangely transformed world, the heavenly beauty and purity of the scene bound us fast and when I looked up my brother seemed strangely excited. He turned to me and said; 'It was in this place with such a scene before me some years ago that I determined my life should be pure and holy. Oh, how our lives are wasted. Promise to me that yours will be devoted to God's glory.' We were alone with God on the mountaintop and we fell on our knees and prayed." (Satthianadhan, qtd. In Mrs. Grigg's "Introductory Memoir" to *Kamala,* xv)

"Starlit evenings" are a repeated motif and symbolize Kamala's spiritual awe but also this experience goes along with the idea of devotional service, of committing to live "devoted to God's Glory." With the conjunction of the feminine and wild nature in *Kamala*, this service is affiliated with motherhood. As wild and sublime as nature is, the benevolent influence of the mother is still present.

On a religious pilgrimage to Dudhasthal, Kamala experiences a sense of having been to the spot before. The scene is redolent with sexual imagery. Dudhasthal itself means "milky spot" with the river spilling into a cave (Satthianadhan 71). The cave is feminine and is the site of Seeta's bath: "the rude slab of rock cut in the shape of a cot

with moss-grown stones underneath and ferns springing up on all sides is the cradle of her babe" (74). Seeta's bath is not only the sexualized prone female receiving the river but also contains "the cradle of her babe" embodying motherhood.

As Kamala stands "on the brink of the rushing river," she feels a "dreamy pain in her head" and a "throb of anguish" and enters into a trance-like state:

> She seemed to have fallen into a trance, for who was it she saw near her leading her by the hand? It was the form of a noble lovely woman who wore a diamond bracelet. The waters hissed and roared round her, and in a moment she felt her foot slip and herself carried forward. Then she seemed to see the woman plunge after her with a cry. The dreadful pool, ah! How dark it looked! A dart of pain passed through her. She was grasped and pulled out by the woman, but when was it and where? (77)

In Brinks' estimation, "Kamala's flash back to that particular moment dramatizes her fear of immersion (self-annihilation) in masculine, sexually charged waters" (157) or a fear of being overpowered by a patriarchy that threatens to overwhelm her own femaleness. The detail of the diamond bracelet grounds the dream to a past reality, an assurance of the once physical manifestation of the mother. When her mother rescues Kamala, Satthianadhan highlights an aspect of motherhood that often goes unacknowledged—a mother's drive to protect her young and the potential for mothers to nurture and shelter their daughters.

There is a paradox in the father-daughter relationship that the title of my thesis implies. Kamala, like many other Hindu daughters, is indeed "beloved" by her father.

Perhaps knowing what future fate awaits his daughter, he tries to give her all the love of a lifetime before she leaves his side: “He lets Kamala grow up like a boy, and the girl is no better than her father. She will tell you the contents of many books though, picked up, you know, from her father” (Satthianadhan 22). He gives her freedom to roam the hills and lulls her to sleep in his arms with the recitation of ancient *shlokas* (34). When Kamala tells her father-in-law how her father taught her the *shlokas*, she mentions how her mother, Lakshmi, was also able to read and encouraged to study by her husband. Through Kamala’s parents’ relationship, Satthianadhan provides an alternative to the forced ignorance of women. Kamala’s father’s encouragement of his daughter’s freedom and education evokes a mythical past which Satthianadhan mentions in her essay, “Female Education”. Kamala is like Savitri who is similarly free and learned but different in the fact that she is not allowed to choose her own husband. Lakshmi, Kamala’s mother, is learned and does choose her own husband although her own father disapproves. In the parents’ relationship, Sattthianadhan illustrates a marriage built on companionship and mutual respect.

After Kamala’s marriage, she finds a willing substitute for her own father in her father-in-law. On the morning of her wedding, the young girl wakes before others and “ran and jumped over the stones like a mountain goat, and sang out in her joy whatever came to her lips.” When she is observed by her father-in-law, he does not chide her free-spirited ways but greets her with a “kindly smile” (25). When she follows him around after the wedding, he wonders at her “guileless ways” and “her total ignorance of the relationship he bore to her as a father-in-law, a man more to be feared than

loved" (25). He comes to look forward to "the little stranger's" visits and is surprised to discover that she can read and knows what is inside his books. However, her sister-in-law, Gungi, is jealous and finds Kamala "immodest and bold." She works upon her mother who "was a simple impressionable sort of woman, very easily led by others" who convinces her husband to stop allowing Kamala in his study (33-35). Kamala's learning is problematic because "[I]n the ethos of the joint family, women's reading was seen as subversive activity as it fostered a desire for privacy and engendered a spirit of individualism—both tendencies were suspect because they were linked with selfishness and a betrayal of the group ethos" (Mukherjee *Perishable Empire*, 72). Furthermore, the daughter-in-law is viewed as the property of her husband's family and as property has no rights of her own, especially not as an individual.

The women in the family find Kamala threatening because she attempts to endear herself to her father-in-law and because she seeks to increase her own knowledge. Her sister-in-law, Gungi, and her mother-in-law object to Kamala's education due to their own lack of it, and their fears that she will threaten their own status within the group. There are financial reasons why a powerful daughter-in-law is viewed with hostility because she "threatens the security of their old age" (Brinks 153). Her mother-in-law tells her husband, she will "wean away his heart from us and where shall we be?" (Satthianadhan 36) When Kamala's husband returns home after passing his examinations, he too is chastised for his efforts to educate Kamala. Women in the novel are not simplistically drawn as passive victims but rather are portrayed as

contributing to the devaluation of their sex within a patriarchal family system that renders their own position insecure.

For this reason, “older women especially were the greatest opponents of reform as they assumed the role of self-appointed guardians of orthodoxy inside the household” (Sen 7). And as a result of this treatment, Kamala “often hid herself in corners and out-of-the-way places. What could she do? People did not like her” (Satthianadhan 36). She is forced to become invisible and voiceless. She innocently does not understand what unspoken laws she has broken, and as a child, internalizes the hate and believes that she must be untouchable.

Satthianadhan does offer an alternative model for female solidarity in the group of young girls who Kamala befriends by the well. She learns that to suffer is a “woman’s lot” but that she is not alone in her suffering. Women do come to each other’s aid in the novel. One evening, the family is invited to a ceremonial and Cinderella-like, the sisters-in-law see no need to take Kamala with them. They ask their mother’s permission to “wear some of Kamala’s jewels.” When Kamala’s friend Kashi (from a superior family) finds out, she is furious: “Who told you to make such a fool of yourself and give away all your jewels to that brat to wear?” (38-41) Kashi takes pity on Kamala, gives her some of her own jewels to wear and brings her to the ceremony. Kashi is trying to teach Kamala an important lesson, that even for women, power is financial, and a woman’s jewels that she brings to a marriage are the only source of power she has and must not be given away.

When Kamala first meets her friends at the well, Bheema, “a big fat bouncing girl” tells her, “I will be your friend” and the “four girls make a silent compact” (40). It is through the stories that the girls tell each other of their travails that Satthianadhan offers her most searing critique of the extended family system. The experiences of the girls are harrowing. Harni, “a fair looking chit of twelve” admits to being beaten and starved “because my husband did not take his food” (39). Bhagirathi’s husband brings a mistress into the house and when she leaves to return to her mother’s house, she is brought back by her angry mother who accuses her: “There! See what you have brought yourself to, go in now” (59). When they see Kamala’s tears, the older girl, Bhagirathi, assures her: “Yes, yes, we know everything. We have gone through it ourselves…. A time will come when not a day will pass without your getting a good beating from them or from your husband, and they will try to poison your very food for you” (38). Female friendship becomes a way for Kamala to learn the ways of the world. Bhagirathi asks Kamala how she has not learned this already: “Did not your mother tell you all this?” (38). But Kamala has no living mother and motherhood belongs to that prelapsarian state of dreams and wild nature, before innocence is lost. Bhagirathi acknowledges Kamala’s innocence: “Whom the gods have not enlightened why should man?” (39) Kamala’s purity functions on two levels. One that she represents an ideal - as a child-like woman whose heart is pure and ever-trusting, and the other, Kamala’s ever present need for protection by surrogate parents whether it be in her father-in-law or in her knowing girlfriends, which highlights her interrupted childhood.

The friends are world-wary but there is an incident in which we see both the rebellious impulses against authority and the youthful playfulness of such an endeavor. Rukhma hatches a plan to frighten Harni's cruel and superstitious mother-in-law. She suggests that the three friends dress up as *apsaras* or spirits – "hair down, faces whitened, eyes flaming, dresses long with black stripes all over." Harni is to stay inside her compound to avoid arousing suspicion but "we will pounce on the old woman as she comes out in the yard" yelling, "We are the three sisters of pestilence and we have come from the gods. We have witnessed the mental anguish and the *vanvasan* (fasting) of the poor suffering daughter-in-law and we will be revenged on her." But poor Harni is sure she will be blamed and "thus ended in smoke Rukhma's wild plan" (105-106). The girls cannot complete their rebellion and vengeance as they know they will be ultimately made to pay by a disciplinary power and Harni will be further punished by her family.

Like an avenging angel, "the shadow of the untamed being – reappears every so often to worry the disciplined figure of the respectable girl-child woman" (Lal 337). The "untamed being" is seen mostly in Kamala's sense of freedom in nature, where it cannot interrupt the functioning of the social order. The only time we see Kamala's anger rise out of righteous indignation is when she has has endured enough of the insults and humiliation that her husband, Ganesh, has cast upon her with the taking of a mistress, the mysterious Sai. Sai is Kamala's foil, where Kamala is innocent, Sai is scheming. Kamala is resigned to her lot as a woman, Sai is not.

Smriti Singh, author of *Feminism and Postcolonialism in Krupabai Satthianadhan*, suggests that Sai is the author's double, a doppelganger who expresses the author's

ambivalence about female liberation (80). She is a loathed character who fails to live up to the ideals of womanhood. More than just representing Satthianadhan's ambivalence, I think that Sai represents the ambivalence that certain segments of bourgeois Indian society felt towards the education of women in the late nineteenth century. This is voiced by Ganesh's conniving brother-in-law:

> Do you know the difference between being educated and uneducated? Whom would you like to have as a wife? A simple, innocent modest girl afraid to open her mouth, or a bold, clever woman wielding such a dreadful power over others as this woman wields? Yet it is education that has made her what she is. She was dissatisfied with her home and her stupid loutish husband, and rumour has it that she poisoned him. Anyhow nobody knows what became of him. She has learnt to her heart's content and now she excels any man in accounts, and as for reading character no philosopher even could equal her. She is independent as a queen and cares not for common folks such as you and me, for she has princes for her friends. Now, do you see what it all means? Do you perceive that the great rise and the great fall are combined in her? I suppose you don't care. Your new learning trains women to be free, but what does it do to their morals? (91-92)

Once a woman has chosen for herself, to become educated and powerful, she is feared by society. A man cannot have his wife know more than him for she will no longer know her rightful place and fail to "love and honour" her husband. Instead, Ganesh's brother-in-law warns, the husband "will be only one of her many admirers who will make *poojah*

to her" thus usurping his primacy as the wife's god (92-93). The brother-in-law suggests that a wife's morality is tied to how much power she has. For those wives who have little of it, will obey their husbands and those who become educated like Sai, will answer to no one. Since Sai is clever and rich, the men have no choice but to fear (and admire) her.

Good morals are way to keep women in check. As a wife, Kamala, "was even less than a servant in her husband's eyes" (172) but is seen as virtuous. Despite Sai being a fallen woman, Ganesh is drawn to her. Why? Sai uses her sexuality to allure men and Satthianadhan chastises her severely. Sai is a temptress and Kamala blames her for Ganesh's transgressions. Sai is outraged by the way Kamala looks at her, "as if the very sight of me were pollution" and decides to revenge herself (108). Kamala fears her for she is "beautiful and bewitching" and as her friend Kashi recognizes, "she has the wiles of the devil" (110-112). Kamala also blames herself, putting her "conduct in the worst possible light" (174). Kamala has so little confidence in herself that she wishes ill upon herself: "Oh, that somebody would trample her down and show her her own mean nature, and then she would learn to avoid such mistakes" (175). From Kamala's perspective, Ganesh is blameless in the affair showing the low esteem Hindu women had for themselves and in a sense their learned helplessness. As a narrator, Satthianadhan does not hold this view, for Ganesh "has a selfish element in his character" and he is only kind to Kamala "to see the beaming look of gratitude in her face" (119). Satthianadhan paints Ganesh as weak and vain, unable to stand up to his family and the advances of Sai.

Sai leaves a "safe" life as Ramchunder's betrothed (who is incidentally Kamala's father's friend and nephew) and chooses a life of independence. By leaving the control of the family unit, her education is contrasted with Kamala's education in traditional Hindu *shlokas*, as unwholesome. Sai knows about suspicious activities in the hills and has the local *bhils* (a local tribe in Central India) spy for her, hinting at her duplicitousness. Even governmental officials "consulted her now and then" (90). As Sai's opposite, Kamala parallels the nationalist ideal of the Indian woman, one who is educated in traditional Hindu texts and is a bastion of morality and tradition. The worldly knowledge that Sai holds give her power and wealth but she too is ambivalent about her role. When she finds out that her betrothed was the young Ramchunder:

> "Her independence, once so attractive, now for a moment disgusted her. "What would I not do to change my lot"—to be virtuous and to be loved by one noble and really great? Ah! How I have been duped." (Satthianadhan 157-158)

It is clear, that given another chance, Sai would have picked differently. To be outside the fold of the community is always the lesser option for a woman. The community as much as it discourages independence in women, also offers them a safe –haven and at times, a system of support. Other women make note of Ganesh's behavior and "on one occasion a neighboring woman visited Kamala; and with well-meant sympathy disclosed Ganesh's movements to her" (173). Sai's true crime is that she thinks only of herself which is unpardonable in a society which values the individual only in relation to the community.

Eventually Kamala does find her own voice and is armed with virtue. When Sai visits her house and dares to order Kamala, Ganesh scolds her with scorn: “Here, rise and do as she tells you” and “[W]ith these words she felt a severe thump on her back and she rolled a few steps” (179). Kamala ignores Sai at first because she is proud: “the independent spirit of her parents, the spirit that made them leave their homes, preferring hardships to a life of luxury” (179) rears up in her. The pride that Satthianadhan finally gives Kamala is not vanity as it is in Sai or Ganesh, but one that is rooted in righteousness and rather than being selfish is portrayed as gaining a stronger sense of self. For all of Kamala’s self-sacrificing obedience, perhaps buoyed by a recent visit by Ramchunder who tells her, “for if you want anything there is plenty at your father’s house” she finds her inner-Kali:

> But the tiger element in her nature was roused. She got up, suppressed the pain, and facing him said:--“You! You! To strike me for this. Take care that God does not strike you in return.” He felt awed. It was an unusual thing for a woman to behave in this fashion, but she faced him and stood her ground” (178-179).

Kamala finally realizes that she is guiltless and claims her rightful place in the community. When Ganesh worries that his name will be tarnished, she responds, “I have only sent the woman away who took my place . . . your lawful wife whom you loved so dearly once” (180).

But Ganesh treats her contemptuously and accuses her of disgracing him with Ramchunder, a lie fabricated by Sai, and insults her purity by saying their child is not his.

Horrified, Kamala leaves with her child in the middle of the night. Kamala is not so self-sacrificing as to take the insult. She also realizes she must defend her reputation and her claim as Ganesh's legitimate wife. Without that role, she knows she will be an outcast.

As a wife, Kamala can never return to her father's house and she makes the unlikely choice to return to her father-in-law's. "Kamala chooses to return to the joint family in a moment of crisis, not to assert her individuality, but to reclaim her share in the life of the community which can offer support and succor to all its members" according to Meenakshi Mukherjee (85). Additionally, Kamala is forever bound to her husband. Even though Ramchunder reminds her that there are ways her father can provide guardianship, Kamala must adhere to the mores of upper-caste Hindu society and will not risk disgracing her father (echoing the earlier story of her friend Bhagirathi who is forcibly returned to her cheating husband by her mother). Moreover, she has to prove her innocence like her ideal, Sita, in the *Ramayana*. After Rama listens to the rumors casting aspersions on Sita's conduct when she is a prisoner of the demon Ravana, Sita performs *agnipariksha,* entering the fire to prove her innocence. Sita comes out unscathed as the fire god refuses to consume her.

In her escape from Ganesh, Kamala experiences a dark night of the soul. She beseeches death, "I implore thee, *Yama* come." But as she looks up at the night sky, "a strange feeling. . . overcame her now" and she is struck the "silent immensity" of the starlit sky that strikes "a thrill through her" (183). As she contemplates her own insignificance in the vast expanse of the universe, the child cradled at her breast awakes and points "her infant hands to the sky" which "gave vent to a wild *whoo* of delight"

(183). And it is her child that brings her back and binds her to the physicality of life, wondering "who would take care of it after she died?"(183) Unlike Sita, who after being tested once again by Rama asks her mother, the Earth, to take her back, there is no going back for Kamala. Led by hope in a future and her sense of duty to her child, and with thoughts of a "wise, loving God," she "ceased to think of the past." It is motherhood that gives her life purpose. Kamala sees her path and tells herself, "Arise and work, for your work lies in this world." It is at this turning point that Kamala leaves the lack she has felt by the loss of her own mother, the ghostly mother who has both sustained her and led her away from this world. When "the selfish sorrow vanished," Kamala sees purpose in her suffering (183-184). She releases her own childhood ghosts and her position as a subject to others whims, and now defines her own path as mother.

Satthianadhan's commentary, while problematic to a modern reader who sees the language of the colonizer infect her view of the scene, contains the answer to the question of how Kamala can serve as a model for change:

> It may seem strange that an experience such as this should have been felt by an ignorant Hindu girl. But even a savage is known to be impressed by grand inspiring scenes of natures, and Kamala, moreover, was different from other Hindu girls, in that she had a highly cultured father and a learned mother; and she herself learnt to feel and think. (184)

Although Kamala is still "an ignorant Hindu girl" and a "savage," she is different in that she has learnt to "feel and think" which is evidence of the liberal Christian doctrine of free choice or the assertion of the individual will. Echoing Satthianadhan's own

background in which her Brahmin father came to Christianity voluntarily and a s a result of reading the Christian scriptures, religious experience is led by personal choice and a consequent awakening. .Kamala might be “ignorant” which I see as implying “innocent,” but she is not illiterate. Her education, by way of her “learned” parents teaches her to reason. A woman’s education need not lead her down a selfish path like Sai but can aid the woman to feel God deeply and fulfill her duty, of living “for others now” not blindly but out of choice (184).

She knocks on the door, asking to be let back into the fold. She is surprised to find that instead of the scolding she expected, her in-laws treat her kindly. She does not have to walk through the fire after all but little does she know that her father has died and left her an heiress. Once again, in the hierarchical structure of the extended family, those who hold the purse are afforded the most respect revealing a fluidity in the power structure. Satthianadhan does not allow a reconciliation between Kamala and Ganesh for he is killed suddenly by cholera. He literally pays for his sins. Now the parents who were afraid of losing their son to their daughter-in-law are deprived of him anyway and it is their daughter-in-law who they will be dependent upon.

However, Kamala’s sufferings are not over. When her daughter begins to ail, Kamala’s worried expression is reflected back to her by a face of innocence. Her child looks at her with a “sympathetic gleam,” and is described, like Kamala was before, as “different from other children,” further associating childhood with an Edenic existence, as being somehow closer to Godliness before the corrupting influences of society have done their work. In this interaction, the narrator appears to distance herself from

Kamala, calling her "the mother" repeatedly (197-199). The effect of this distancing is to universalize Kamala's experience of loss. It is not just Kamala who is losing her child but a grief that any mother can identify with. Once again, Satthianadhan attempts to offer Kamala the support of her faith, using nature as a symbol of it, as she faces the loss of her child. Although "the night was dark," there is a "faint glimmer of star-light" which enters the room and outside, "the stars shone brightly, and the wind moaned and sighed with a sad, sad wail" (200). The wind, once her playmate, is now by use of a pathetic fallacy, her companion in anguish. It is as though nature itself, the universe reflected in the starlight is both sympathetic and a source of meaning in times of human grief:

> Did she know that time was speeding, and that the star-light now shone on her child and herself? And did she know that the infant spirit had taken to itself wings when she was singing the tear-woven melody? Kamala sat cold as stone with the child clasped to her breast, and the morning found her in a dead faint leaning back on the wall. They thought the mother and child had both gone; but the one revived to the consciousness of an aching void that would never be filled, and the other had flown away." (202)

In the author's own life, shortly after writing *Saguna*, she gave birth to a child who lived only a few short months. After this, Grigg notes in her "Introductory Memoir" to *Kamala*, Satthianadhan's husband claimed that "she was never the same after this great loss" (xxvii). Satthianadhan's description of Kamala echoes her own anguish: "she hid

herself from all around and cried in the secret of her heart for her lost treasure—her little babe" (202).

While critics have to this point related Satthianadhan's biographical details mostly to *Saguna*, and viewed *Kamala* as a novel of social reform, it is clear that Satthianadhan's sensitivity to the role of motherhood and the loss of that primary bond as mother or as child, inflect the spirit of this narrative with poignancy and depth. All three novels in this thesis explore the physical and emotional strain caused by the rupture of this bond. Kamala inhabits both a spiritual world where union with the dead mother is possible and the physical world in which a mother's suffering is inexorable. But there are many ways to be a mother, and Kamala's "still found some crumbs of joy still left in this life for her" when her friend Kashi, brings Kamala her baby to hold (203).

When Ramchunder, who she was promised to by her mother, comes to offer Kamala a chance at freedom, a companionate marriage based on mutual love, Kamala rejects him:

> "Ask me not that," she said, with a shudder. "It is too much for me to think of. Did we wives not die on the funeral pyre in days of old? Did we not court the water and the floods'? What has come over us now? My heart beats in response to yours, but betray me not, thou tempting heart. I am ashamed of myself. Despise me and drive away from thee. Look not on my face. I am the accursed among women. There is something wrong in my nature, and that is why the gods have disgraced me" (206).

Kamala's "ask me not that" echoes Tennyson's Princess Ida in *Bianca* who says, "Ask me no more." What are these women asking? It is as though Kamala has made a choice as to how she will give and re-entering a sexual relationship as wife and thus as a property is too much to ask of her. Satthianadhan sees Kamala's inability to accept Ramchunder's offer as a sign of her social conformity and inability to break away from the patriarchal paradigm that seeks to limit a woman's desires: "Her religion, crude as it was, had its victory. She felt that her life would have been an unending remorse and misery; and thus she freed herself from the great overpowering influence of the man before her" (207). She believes that it is because there is something wrong in her nature that makes her "accursed." Kamala finds herself unable to choose selfishly, and if she were to do so, she would be filled with "remorse." She would accept the small recompense that at least "some one loved her, loved her for her own sake" (207) even if she believes that she has no right to claim that love as her own.

Smriti Singh, interprets Kamala's eventual rejection of Ramchunder as "Satthianadhan going back to the past customs from which she has attempted to rescue Kamala" (78). Kamala is bound to her husband Ganesh in life and in death. Perhaps so, but in her rejection of Ramchunder, Kamala is also choosing freedom from the sexual relations that so necessarily bind women. She says no to Ramchunder because ironically she is like Sai now, with no need for a man. Subhendu Mund in "A Portrait of an Indian Lady," points to other nineteenth century female heroines in Indian fiction who have chosen renunciation over sexual fulfillment: Matangini in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajomohan's Wife*, Binodini in Rabindranath Tagore's *Binodini (Chokher Bali),* Indumati

in Kshetrepal Chakravarti's *Sarala*. Mund recognizes that for an Indian, "peace is not at individual levels. It is the observance of the values accepted by society" (6). In *Kamala,* the two star-crossed lovers choose to sublimate their love for each other in charitable works.

Although Kamala has lost her own child, she turns her attention to working for the benefit of others, choosing a maternal role that is not concomitant with that of being a wife. After her death, she is canonized as a "saint," and her "unseen hands still relieve the poor and protect the unfortunate; for she left her fortune for the sole benefit of widows and orphans" (208). In death, she achieves disembodied motherhood but on her own terms and in the fulfillment of her dharma. A shrine is dedicated to her on the hill by the temple of Rohini, the moon goddess, who in some Hindu myths is also the surrogate mother of Krishna's brother, Balarama, suggesting the ability of Kamala to mother all. Kamala also conforms to the Hindu nationalist ideal of sacred motherhood, in which the immaterial mother is able provide spiritual sustenance to a nation. Likewise, in Mrs.Griggs' estimation, "Krupabai Satthianadhan has left no children to follow in her footsteps, but her memory is a precious possession to all true daughters of India" (xxxvi).

Chapter IV

Mothers and Daughters in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*

Kamala Markandaya with her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, published in 1954, is the successor of a literary tradition that can be traced back to Dutt and Satthianadhan. While creating a novel that mirrors the dawning of India as a new nation, Markandaya's characters are rooted in the nineteenth-century conservative traditions that dictated familial and social life while simultaneously trying to adapt to a new way of life. I contextualize Markandaya's first novel by what has come before it. Written when India, as a nation, was not even a decade old, *Nectar in a Sieve* stands at the junction between India's colonial past and its future as an independent nation.

Like Dutt and Satthianadhan, Kamala Purnaiah (her nom de plume was Markandaya) was also born into a privileged class, belonging to an affluent Mysore Brahmin family. Born in 1924, Markandaya was educated in English at school and attended the University of Madras. When she was twenty-five, she moved to London with the purpose of working as a journalist. There she met her husband, Bertrand Taylor, and spent most of her life in England.

As an Indian woman, marrying an Englishman and choosing to live in England, she gained a sort of outsider status. In writing a review of her novel, *Two Virgins*, the prominent Indian poet and critic, Nissim Ezekial said this of her: "An Indian writer living permanently abroad can always be trusted to write knowingly about life in an Indian

village. The writing may be as wretched as the village life, but readers in London, New York and similar places are fascinated by its exoticism" (qtd. In George 407). Rosemary Marangoly George further cites Rochelle Almeida's study of "Indianess" in Markandaya's work, that deemed Markandaya as "not Indian" due to her "not-Indian English, her not-Indian treatment of sexuality and other themes, all written for a not-Indian audience" and Markandaya has suffered a worse fate in "postcolonial appraisals" for being "a self-exoticizing anglophile who barters in universals"(407). In *Nectar in a Sieve,* what is universal is human suffering. *Nectar in a Sieve* enjoyed critical success in America and was chosen to be part of the Book-of the-Month Club in June 1955 but this was not the only English speaking audience Markandaya had in mind. As George notes, Markandaya's Indian audience "derived great satisfaction from her worldwide success with *Nectar* even though there was much cataloging of the "mistakes" that Markandaya made in her representation of Indian village folk, their speech, and their lives, rituals, and practices" (403). Implausabilities in the novel do exist, such as two peasants in a South Indian village naming their daughter "Irawaddy" after one of the "great rivers in Asia" (20). Though her locations often go unnamed, anyone familiar with the terrain of South India will recognize the landscape of her paddy fields and coconut palms. The naming of Chamundi Hill in her unnamed city, is the name of a hill in Mysore, where Markandaya was born.

The primary issue is the problem of representation. *Nectar in a Sieve* is about a rural peasant family and the mother of this family, Rukmani, in an unnamed South Indian village at around the time of India's Independence in 1947. According to George,

"Markandaya's English is not the hybrid Indian English of Narayan, Anand, or Rushdie but a carefully pruned standard English that uses Western novelistic norms of suggesting complex subjectivities all encased in a realist narrative style" (407). In India, this "standard English" is called King's English or "proper English" which like Markandaya's syntax and diction, can sound archaic. I argue that in mid-century India, there was an entire class of elite, English-educated Indians whose spoken and written dialect sounded just like Markandaya's "carefully pruned" English. Markandaya's own historical subjectivity as a member of a certain class is at times problematic in its representation of a lower-class family but not cannot be dismissed as inauthentic.

Kshanike Minoli Salgado in her analysis of Indian literary feminism, interprets this archaic sounding language as Biblical and sees in the plot, an epic quality (42). In fact, as a bildungsroman, Rukmani's story is in the mold of the Biblical Job, who suffers all sorts of tribulations but never gives up his faith in God. Rukmani's acceptance of her fate also epitomizes the nationalist idea of the self-sacrificing woman. As an epic heroine, Rukmani's journey follows the archetypal pattern of "rejection-initiation-return" (Geeta 170). She must leave her village, go to the city, and in the end return home. P. Geeta sees this archetypal journey from "the village to the city, or from tradition to modernity, or in essence from innocence to knowledge" as metaphorical of Indian culture itself moving from a purely agricultural economy to the rapid industrialization encouraged by Nehru (170). The heroine in keeping with the nationalist ideal of woman, is representative of Mother India.

Contemporaneous to Markandaya's novel was the block-buster release in 1957 of Mehboob Khan's film, *Mother India,* starring Nargis. The film addresses similar notions about the role of women in the context of nation formation. The film opens with scenes of rushing water and a dam. An old mother, Radha, is asked to inaugurate the opening of the dam and she resists. Both film and novel reflect the zeitgeist of the new nation. They both explore the the effects of India's rush towards industrial progress—with the dam in the film and the tannery in the novel, representing progress as well as the destruction of rural life. The woman, as symbol of tradition, resists this progress and attempts to keep the family together, confronting the threat of deculturation and the loss of established ways of life. Critic, Jasbir Jain's analysis of the film *Mother India* applies on many levels to the moralistic vision in *Nectar in a Sieve*:

> "This narrative of human struggle is placed against the background of the changing economic scenario and Nehruvian development. This nationalist allegory makes women's body, her sexuality vs. asexuality and motherhood a central issue. Men are either attackers or failed protectors, and when they succeed, the condition of their survival is that they continue to adhere to the moral code of their women. Struggle, sacrifice, and self-denial are seen as a necessary part of womanhood. *Mother India* works with multiple subtexts with the religious and moralistic films of the previous decades constituting a long line of inheritance." (1654)

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani serves as a model for upholding traditional values. When women fail at this task, as is the case with Rukmani's neighbor, Kunthi, who sleeps with Nathan to bear her impotent husband sons, and later uses her beauty to

become a prostitute servicing men who work in the nearby tannery in order to survive, she is severely castigated. In fact, when she dares to cast aspersions as to the morality of the heroine, Rukmani physically attacks her in an act of moral outrage. Kunthi is abandoned by both her sons and her husband who marries another woman.

Rukmani, as an allegory for "Mother India" is a recasting of the nineteenth-century and later Gandhian nationalist myth of woman as fortress of moral strength as well as a more socialist Nehruvian type – a peasant woman who retains much of her stoicism and capacity for suffering but one who is on equal terms with her husband, a vital contributor to the livelihood of her family, with intelligence and education. Like Radha in *Mother India*, she bears all ills without complaint and never rebukes her husband for his weaknesses. She retains those qualities lauded in Indian women—her raison d'étre is to produce sons for her husband, and to worship her husband above all else. In her unwavering virtue, Radha has to kill one of her errant sons and similarly, Rukmani physically attacks the female characters who have transgressed—Kunthi and eventually her own daughter, Irawaddy.

Allegorically speaking, it is in India's children that we see her future. India as mother has witnessed the loss of her sons due to the ravages of poverty, the capriciousness of nature, and senseless colonial brutality, much as Rukmani loses her children for the same reasons. The future is also in Rukmani's sons, Arjun and Thambi, who stand up against unfair pay at the tannery. Although they are fired for striking, they do not accept oppression as passive victims. Markandaya foretells the danger of losing one's sons to a foreign country when India fails to provide them with livelihoods. Arjun and Thambi

leave to find work in Ceylon and their mother never sees them again. Rukmani's son, Selvam, uses his education to better himself, and her daughter Ira becomes the mother of the future, who as a non-conformist, loves her bastard albino child despite the social stigma.

Contextualizing the difference between Gandhi's and Nehru's model for Indian womanhood in mythic terms, critic, Reba Som, writes: "If Sita was Gandhi's model woman to be emulated, it was Chitrangada, the Manipuri princess immortalized in Rabindranath Tagore's celebrated lyrical drama, that Jawaharlal looked up to" (34). Chitrangada, who eventually married the Pandava prince, Arjuna, demanded that her husband see her as an equal. In Nehru's own marriage to Kamala, although often separated by imprisonment and Kamala's failing health, he encouraged her to fight alongside him and saw women as "co-sharers" in India's destiny (Som 36). In his *Discovery of India,* Nehru writes of Kamala saying to him:

> "I am Chitra. No Goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity, to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self." (36)

Gandhi on the other hand, discouraged women with familial responsibilities from joining his movement. Although it was Gandhi who had encouraged India's women to join the fight against the British, it was their capacity for "silent suffering that lent credence to his non-violent satyagraha" (36). Som quotes a letter from Margaret Cousins, one of the founding members of the All India Women's conference, to Gandhi:

"Division of sexes in a non-violent campaign seems unnatural and is against all the awakened consciousness of women today…" (37). In the novel, Rukmani offers her husband support when he loses hope, shares in his work as a farmer, and saves rice for times of famine. His respect for her, further solidifies the equality in their marriage. While Toru Dutt presented an ideal for men and women, to choose each other in *Bianca* and Satthianadhan critiqued the practice of child marriage and enjoyed a companionate marriage herself, Markandaya presents a twelve-year-old Rukmani who marries a poor tenant farmer who proves to be an ideal spouse.

Markandaya creates a heroine whose lower social class releases her from the conventions that dictated the lives of middle and upper class Hindu women. She is not an activist "for the peasant woman protest appears like an ideological luxury" (Salgado 49). She always refers to Nathan, as "my husband" for it is "not meet" that she calls him anything else (Markandaya 10). Even the fact that Rukmani is married at twelve is more mentioned in passing than focused upon which is perhaps Markandaya's attempt to portray the subjective worldview of a peasant woman. Markandaya's focuses her critique on a hegemonic system that uses economics and class to subjugate the poor, especially its women. While Rukmani does step outside of accepted gender roles, as when she attempts to take control of her fertility by asking the European Doctor Kenny to help her conceive a son, her aim is not to redefine her role as a woman. It is to survive in a world that has already been created around her.

Susie Tharu, in analyzing Gita Hariharan's contemporary novel, *The Art of Dying*, identifies what is at the core of this other tale about a woman: "The enemy here is not

patriarchy, but social world that fails to sustain the spirit. The victim is fleshly nature itself, not women" ("Impossible Subject" 158). In *Nectar in a Sieve,* the struggle is between the individual and forces that seem to overwhelm the "natural appetite for life" – colonialism, industrialization, poverty, *and* the subjugation of women in a social economy that commodifies them (158). The novel is about injustice towards the subaltern but its feminist stance is in tying the progress of a new nation to the strength and to the advancement of its women.

The novel begins with the first person narrative of Rukmani, who is now an old widow. She recalls her childhood as the fourth daughter of a village headman. As her sisters are married, their weddings and dowries whittle down till there is little left for Rukmani. When she naively believes that she will be alright because her father is the village headman, her older brother says, "Don't speak like a fool, the headman is no longer of consequence. There is the Collector, who comes to these villages once a year, and to him is the power, and to those he appoints; not to the headman" (Markandaya 8). Even at the beginning of the novel, we see the economic changes wrought on traditional Indian society as a result of colonialism. The collector is sent to collect taxes by either the colonial government or the landowner who is sanctioned by the government to extort money from the peasants. The headman is "no longer of consequence" and power has been transferred to an unknown district collector who reports to a further unknown colonial government.

When Rukmani is still in her father's house, he attempts to prepare her for the future by teaching her to read and write: "For who knows what dowry there will be for

you when you are ready" (16). After her marriage, the other village women see little value in Rukmani's literacy and her friend Kali "was scornful of the strange symbols which had no meaning for her and dismissed it as a foible of pregnancy" (16). Representing the traditional view on women's education, her friend tells her, "You will forget all about such nonsense when your child is born" as if motherhood is the only skill a woman is required or might want to have (16). When her husband sees her writing, Rukmani says: "I am sure it could not have been easy for him to see his wife more learned than he himself was, for Nathan could not even write his name; yet not once did he assert his rights and forbid my pleasure, as lesser men might have done" (17). Both Rukmani and Nathan are progressive in their views which reiterates Nehru's belief that if women were to be uplifted, men would have to change too. As a mother, Rukmani teaches her children to read and write as well, which sees fruition in her son, Selvam, who becomes the assistant to Doctor Kenny who sets up a dispensary in the village. Selvam is the one who "bends like the grass" and is able to provide for his family in the end (32). Markandaya's claim then is that education is the key to growth and it is interesting that it is the mother who makes sure that this happens. While Nathan wants his sons to work on the farm with him, Rukmani realizes that by educating her sons, they will be able to survive in a hitherto unknown economic landscape.

Rukmani represents the individual's suffering under the overwhelming currents of colonial rule and poverty. When the local village economy is threatened by the building of a tannery owned by a white man, the "cultural chaos and economic exploitation" that ensue are what "part of the legacy of British colonialism" (Zelany 26).

The workers look and speak the same language but are strangers. The "overseer" is Indian but is dressed in Western garb and when his sahib, a red-faced white man comes, he shoos the villagers away "as if he owned us" (Markandaya 31). The prices in the market become unaffordable for the local villagers. Some leave their native way of life on the farm to work in the factory, and they become subject to cruel capitalist practices. Markandaya not only indicts colonialism but voices anxieties implicit in Indian society post-Independence. With Nehru's ambitious Five Year Plans to grow the economy and ramp up India's industrial production, there is a danger of change coming too quickly: "Change I had known before, and it had been gradual . . . but the tannery "seemed wrought in the twinkling of an eye" (29).

Later in the novel, when the zamindar decides to finally sell their land, Rukmani and Nathan are forced to leave their livelihood, the land, and go in search of their third son, Murugun, in the city. The tale is a familiar one. The city for many of India's rural poor is a beacon of hope. But when Rukmani and Nathan arrive in the city they are lost in a sea of faces. Their son has disappeared and they have no one to turn to. They fail to find employment and quickly become destitute. Even Rukmani's skills as a writer and reader fail to earn them more than two annas a day and passers-by scoff at her: "Says she can read! These village folk are certainly getting above themselves," (169) exposing the bias that "city folk" hold against villagers.

Lost in the city, Rukmani and Nathan take refuge at a temple where their pots and sleeping mats are stolen. While they are asleep, their money is stolen. As "simple" village folk, they are repeatedly taken advantage of and even in a temple, morality is

superseded by the ruthless need to survive. They work back-breaking hours at a granite quarry in order to save enough money to return to their village. City life is depicted as isolating, in sharp contrast to the village in which social relations offer support to members of the community. Nathan and Rukmani become part of the teeming millions who are alienated from the promise of progress. Markandaya draws industrialization and city-life as dehumanizing and agricultural rural-life with its closeness to nature as life-sustaining.

In Jaya Mitra's "The Other Voice: Women's Writing in India," she claims that "[N]arratives by women writers do carve a subjecthood through memory, perception, recall, and dream structures. They also constitute it through the body and the act of giving birth. But more than this narratives emphasize the flow of life by comparisons with the world of nature" (1657). Written in the first-person, Rukmani recalls her life story which allows the reader to view the narrative through a feminine perspective. As an older widow, looking back on her life, the moments that mark her journey are related not by historical events but how they have affected the relationships in her life.

Woman is often allied with nature for the physical fact of giving birth. In Satthianadhan's *Kamala*, nature represents free female space, in *Nectar in a Sieve*, nature is both associated with the cycle of birth and motherhood, and is at times the subject of male violation--both in Markandaya's treatment of prostitution and in the invasion of the industrial (read male) tannery into the pristine village landscape. In "Planting Seeds in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*" Beth Zeleny writes, "Markandaya implicitly connects woman and landscape through her recurring use of

seed imagery" (29). As a young bride, Rukmani is enthralled with the growth of the little garden she plants outside her hut: "The seeds sprouted quickly, sending up delicate green shoots that I kept carefully watered . . . fattening on soil and water, swelled daily larger and larger and ripened to yellow and red, until at last they were ready to eat. . ." (Markandaya 14). Her husband is "full of admiration" and tells her that she is "indeed a clever woman" (14). In a rural economy, woman's work is valuable and Rukmani has the kind of husband who can acknowledge this. She describes, working alongside him in the field, coming behind his plough, "strewing the seed to either side and sprinkling the earth over from the basket at my hip" (21). Rukmani's ability to work in the home and in the fields reflects the reality of many peasant women. Leela Gulati's essay, "Myth and reality: In the Context of Poor Working Women in Kerala," identifies the nature of work for many lower-class Indian women. Women have to work to support the irregular incomes of their parents and then their husbands and "the work situation is the first reality of their lives" (87). They work not out of choice but because "their commitment to the family is more intense" (87).

Woman's work as mother is also vital and the growth of Rukmani's garden parallels her pregnancy: "I was young and fanciful then, and it seemed to me not that they grew as I did, unconsciously, but that each of the dry, hard pellets I held in my palm had within it the very secret of life itself, curled tightly within, under leaf after protective leaf for safekeeping, fragile, vanishing with the first touch or sight." (17). The imagery is reminiscent of human life, and the baby growing within her.

Markandaya portrays women as nurturers and providers of sustenance in the novel. Like the land which provides the family with food, Rukmani prepares and saves food for her children. She is also described as nursing her three-year old son, Selvam, in a time of famine. When Kenny asks her why she is still nursing the boy, she tells him it is because they have had to sell their goat (37). She sets aside a store of rice and rations it after a flood destroys the crop. It is the woman who saves the seed for hard-times. The earth also provides the family with their main source of food, rice. When Rukmani finally returns home at the end of the novel, her daughter Irawaddy, which means "giver of life," "once again juxtaposing woman and seed," cooks rice for her mother (Zelany 29). Ira has become the mother figure, one who is closest to the land in that she never leaves the village, and provides her mother with nourishment.

One year when the rains fail, Rukmani and Nathan are forced to sell their belongings to keep their land. Even after selling their bullocks, her saris, their kitchen pots, the amount is still not enough and Nathan suggests selling the seed. But Rukmani objects, saying, "If we sell the seed we may as well give up the land too, for how shall we raise a new crop?" (80) Nathan sees the seed as something replaceable, "it can be bought," but to Rukmani, it means sacrificing "the future to our immediate need" (80). The seed is next year's crop and as the epigraph to the novel states, "Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve/And hope without an object cannot live" (Coleridge). Without next year's seed, life is a matter of surviving in the moment having no hope for the future. Rukmani is advocating an agricultural way of life, of feeding one's family off the land, echoing the Gandhian notion of self-reliance. Depending on industry and the

capriciousness of others makes one vulnerable and she tells Nathan, “what chance have you when so many young men are festering in idleness!” (80) The young men at the tannery work without hope and without an object—they do not see the product of their labor and their work has no guarantee for the future. They are expendable, with many others waiting to take their place. Rukmani sees more hope in a life in which the community depends on itself and the land provides.

But nature is not always nurturing mother. Especially in an agricultural economy, one is dependent on the whims of nature and when she unleashes her fury, the village starves. Rukmani sees nature as “a wild animal that you have trained to work for you” but like a wild animal, it is unpredictable (43). The villagers are at the mercy of a monsoon that “broke early with an evil intensity such as none could remember before” (43). When the paddy is drowned, “there will be little eating done this year” (44). When Rukmani sees Kenny, she tells him that she has a little rice and “it will last us until times are better” (47). But Kenny yells at her:

> Times will not be better for many months. Meanwhile you will suffer and die, you meek suffering fools. Why do you keep this ghastly silence? Why do you not demand-cry out for help—do something? There is nothing in this country, oh God, there is nothing!
>
> (47-48)

Kenny rails against the attitude of placid acceptance. The family in starvation, sinks to an animalistic state, even eating grass (91). Why does India’s poor not “demand” and cry out for help? In spite of being accused of “bartering in universals,” or in other words,

bartering in Western humanistic values, Markandaya does not judge Rukmani's philosophy. Rukmani sees Kenny's outburst as violent and shrinks away from him. Indian women have taken the brunt of suffering for various reasons but this stoicism is a fundamental aspect of Hindu philosophy. In believing in a "higher reality" and the goal of life to be *moksha* or enlightenment*,* one life is but a moment in time. This translates into a form of hopefulness and faith which is at the center of Rukmani's character: "For centuries, Indian civilization has conveyed to the growing mind the almost somatic conviction that there is an order, even if hidden and unknown, to our visible world. That there is a design to life that can be trusted in spite of life's sorrows, cruelties and injustices" (Kakar and Kakar 183). Deprived of material power to do anything about their fate, Indian women exert power in their "spiritual faith" (Salgado 28).

Rukmani's sons belong to a new generation who refuse to accept the order of things at the tannery. When they ask for more money, "they took from us our eating time" (Markandaya 68). When most of the workers return to work after an ineffectual strike, Arjun bitterly exclaims, "The people will never learn" (69). Rukmani remembers the same words from Kenny and wonders,

> Kenny had said it, and I had not understood, now here were my own sons saying the same thing, and still I did not understand. What was it we had to learn? To fight against tremendous odds? What was the use? One only lost the little one had. Of what use to fight when the conclusion is known? (69)

By recalling the same sentiments coming from Kenny, Markandaya aligns the sons' resistance to a more Western way of thinking. What the Western Kenny sees as

fatalism, Rukmani sees as acceptance. There is a failure to understand each other's "different realms of experience," "thrown together by history and undergoing the painful and transforming process of mutual accommodation" (Salgado 20). For Rukmani, individual rebellion will only end in pain. But for her sons, unless people unite against oppression, things will never change. Post-independence, India had to grapple with a monolithic philosophy that endured suffering in hopes of a better abstract future, versus the contending socialist forces that begged the question, what was India going to do to better her lot? Her sons are a new generation of Indians, who reject their parents' meekness and demand action.

Rukmani and Nathan's daughter, Irawaddy, also represents change. Ira's story, as told by her mother, who is sympathetic to her daughter due to their shared burden of womanhood, creates a sense of deep empathy in the reader. When Rukmani gives birth to Ira, she cries because she is not a boy. Already, at birth, Ira is at a disadvantage. Rukmani traces Ira's story from idyllic innocence were she is the same as a boy into adulthood when Ira is rejected by her husband for her apparent barrenness and made to suffer repeatedly because of her powerlessness as a woman. Rukmani remembers Ira as a five-year-old: "Our little girl ran about in the sun bare and beautiful as she grew, with no clothes to hamper her limbs or confine her movements" until her father tells the mother to "Cover her . . . It is time" (26). As a five-year old, she is already the shadow of a woman (see Ruby Lal). From the time she is little, her mother "put away a rupee or two against the time Ira would be married" (28). As a girl, freedom is not hers

to keep as she must be covered and learn the ways of womanhood. A girl lives as a child fleetingly; her path to womanhood is singular—to prepare her for being a wife.

At thirteen, Ira is described as a little mother, with her younger brothers lying asleep in her arms. It is this imbrication of motherhood upon girlhood that changes things for Ira. When the tannery comes to their village, Rukmani's friend Kali warns the parents: "Do you not see the eyes of the young men lighting on her? If you are not careful you will not find it easy to get her a husband" (34). The girl-child is already a woman and subject to the threatening male gaze. As her parents become more watchful, "Poor child, she was bewildered by the many injunctions we laid upon her, and the curtailing of her freedom tried her sorely, though not a word of complaint came from her" (34). Even her mother acknowledges that she is still a child and innocent about sexuality.

At fourteen, despite the fact that "I kept Ira as long as I could," she is married and accepts her parents' choice with her "usual docility" (40). Her parents only have one hundred rupees for a dowry but her beauty secures her a good match with a boy with prospects. But five years later, when she has failed to conceive, her husband brings her back to her parents' house. Her parents reassure her, "Did you think we would blame you for what is not your fault?" (54) Ira still feels the weight of social pressure that only legitimizes a woman's worth if she is a mother to sons: "There are others . . . Neighbors, women . . . and I a failure, a woman who cannot even bear a child" (54). Rukmani identifies with her daughter's travails as she too had once failed to conceive until Kenny helped her. Although Rukmani reassures Ira that God is "merciful," she immediately

thinks of going to Kenny for help, embodying a more progressive stance in Indian culture where faith and science are not opposed to each other.

After Ira finds out that it is too late, as her husband has "taken another woman," something in her breaks and she turns away from her mother, "spending long hours in the country by herself," especially since Rukmani herself is pregnant again (65). Rukmani tells her daughter not to the blame her son-in-law for his need for sons which is either misogynistic or as Kakar and Kakar have pointed out, displays a certain "context sensitivity" present in Indian morality which judges a person's morals based on the context in which they are applied (189). Nonetheless, it leaves Ira rootless, with no identity as a woman, as now she is not attached to a man. After Ira is rejected by a patriarchal system that only values her as a producer of sons, she finds solace by becoming a surrogate mother to her brothers. As an analogue to Satthianadhan's Kamala, who finds a way to be a "surrogate" mother to orphans and widows, Ira separates the role of motherhood from the role of a wife which supports a key argument I make in this thesis. While motherhood is considered normative for women, it is the one relationship a woman can have in which she is free of her relational and necessarily inferior status to a man. Motherhood is a way for women to bond with others and connect to the community in a way that does not have to be synonymous with being a wife. This separation of roles is destabilizing to a patriarchal system that seeks to limit women by tying their social status to a male relative.

When Rukmani's baby, Kuti (Tamil for "small child"), is born, Ira bonds immediately with him. During a famine, the starving baby is soothed by Ira who

sacrifices her own food for him: “But more often than not, he turned away, unable to take the rough food we offered, and then she would hold him against her and give him her breast, and he would pull at the parched teat and be soothed, and for a while his thin wailing would die away” (92). A woman’s body once again offers sustenance and pacification.

Both mother and daughter worry that Kuti will not live and Markandaya highlights the difference between the old and the new way of thinking:

> I gazed at the small tired face, soothed by sleep as it had not been for many nights, and even as I puzzled about the change, profound gratitude flooded through me, and it seemed to me that the Gods were not remote, not unheedful, since they had heard his cries and stilled them as it were by a miracle. Irawaddy crept up to me as I watched, and smiled at me and the child; and I whispered, “He is better,” but there was no need as she, of all people, knew. (98-99)

While the mother prays, the daughter as surrogate acts to save the boy’s life. Since Ira has lost her status in society after being rejected by her husband, she transgresses further by becoming a prostitute to the men at the tannery in order to earn money for food, underscoring the corruption of the industrialized world which treats human life with little value, and demonstrating the commodification of a woman’s body as tradable object for men’s pleasure.

Nehru did not see prostitution as the sole depravity of its practitioners. In responding to concerns about prostitution in the Allahabad municipal area in the 1920s, he wrote,

"prostitutes do not carry on their ancient trade by themselves. . . the proper way to deal with the question of prostitution is to make it dishonorable for a man as for a woman to help in it" (Som 45). In the novel, the men are never called into question. Even Rukmani's husband Nathan, admits to being the father of their neighbor, Kunthi's, sons, but faces no recrimination from his wife because she too is guilty of keeping secrets from him. Rukmani never tells us exactly how Doctor Kenny helps her but she implies that after years of barrenness, she decides to seek his advice and is able to conceive. No dalliance is implied and her secret appears to have more to do with the fact that as a woman she is expected to be able to bear children with ease or have no value. In Rukmani's mind, her husband's infidelity is equal to her keeping her visit to a doctor a secret.

On the other hand, as woman Irawaddy is made to pay dearly for her transgressions –first when her mother attacks her and then when she gives birth to an illegitimate child. Rukmani, like nature itself, can be wrathful towards her children. In a dream-state, Rukmani attacks Irawaddy who is returning home at night, mistaking her for the evil Kunthi who has previously blackmailed Rukmani and stolen her food:

> My fancies fled headlong from me; in their place a cloud of black and grey arose, revolving before my eyes and assuming fantastic shapes and forms until at last one stood out clearly way from the swirling mists and with a face to it. Kunthi. . .

> I threw myself at it, pinioning the arms savagely; thrust at it and beat it to the ground; fell on it with fury; felt the weak struggles of the body beneath mine like the weak fluttering of a trapped bird, and exulted . . .The being that was me was no longer in possession: it had been consumed in the flames of anger and hatred that raged through me in those few minutes; what took its place I do not know. (99-100)

Ironically, Kunthi herself has had to become a prostitute since her husband has deserted her. Rukmani is blinded by rage and calls Kunthi/Irawaddy "it" repeatedly, as if they stop being human. She also speaks of her own "being" as being taken possession of, distancing her idea of her own self as "good mother" from the wild attacker she has become. She compares the creature she has overpowered to a "trapped bird," indicating the enormity of her power. But when the madness leaves Rukmani, she hears her daughter's "thin, shrill scream. Mother! Mother!" Rukmani becomes the "accursed mother," who has turned on her own seed in the senseless way the monsoon destroys all in its path. As a symbol of virtue, the mother also becomes the source of retribution when her daughter violates the rules of female morality. It is Nathan who pulls Rukmani off of her daughter and accuses her of being a "murderess" (100). Nathan, who will not eat the food his daughter's profession brings them, is a "failed protector" (Jain 1654). There is a sense of helplessness in his nature. Nathan is portrayed as effete, unable to solve a single crisis in the novel. Their problems appear to be Rukmani's sole responsibility to solve. Despite the lower classes being subject to some of the same patriarchal expectations of gender roles, Markandaya is reinforcing

the idea that women in the lower classes often carry the weight of taking care of the family, as workers inside and outside the home. Both Rukmani and Nathan are forced to face their failure as protectors of their daughter's virtue and as providers for their little son: "I knew then that it was she who had been responsible for the improvement of Kuti, not I, not my prayers" (Markandaya 101). She is horrified that she has failed as a mother on multiple counts and nurses her daughter's wounds, knowing that her inability to shelter her children is as bad as her actual attack.

Markandaya uses nature imagery to highlight Rukmani's consonance with the natural world. While Ira is described as a "trapped bird", Rukmani's youngest son, Kuti, is "[L]ike a bruised fledgling, with the dry parched lips of exhaustion and a body which could struggle no more" (104). Like a mother bird, she "crooned to him, forgetting he was dead" (104). The fragility and smallness of human life is underscored by the use of bird imagery. The helpless parents see, "Our last child, conceived in happiness at a time when the river of our lives ran gently, had been taken from us" (104-105). As a result of Rukmani's religious worldview, she accepts this fate with the child being "taken from us" and does not focus on what she could have done to prevent this loss. The "river of our lives" suggests the inevitability of providence. As a member of the poorest of India's population, what could a poor farmer do? Acceptance is about surviving in a world which one has little control over.

Hope comes to Ira out of her own sorrow. As a bastion of morality, Rukmani sees the birth of a child within marriage as affirming for women because the wife "will

carry his seed and he will see her fruitful" (118) but worries about Ira and the child she has conceived as a prostitute:

> But the man who finds a woman in the street, raises an eyebrow and snaps his fingers so that she follows him, throws her a few coins so that he may possess her, holds her unresisting whatever he does to her, for this is what he has paid for—what cares such a man for the woman who is his for a brief moment? He has gained his relief, she her payment, he merges carelessly into the human throng, consigning her back into the shadows where she worked or to the gaudy streets where she loitered. (118)

Ironically, in her marriage, Ira is unable to conceive and her husband abandons her because it is never considered to be the man's fault that a woman cannot conceive. While Rukmani sees marriage as a woman's protection from such degradation (ignoring the fact that Ira was humiliated by her husband), Ira emerges from being the victim of a system that uses her body and denies her spirit, and finds consolation as a mother.

Ira's baby is born an albino. To the grandparents, this is a mark of his sinful origin. However, Ira only sees him as "a lovely child" who is "fair as a blossom," the blossom being the product of a seed who the rational Kenny sees as faring "no worse than a child born in wedlock" (118-119). Nathan as voice of the old traditions, thinks Ira "has lost her reason" but her brother, Selvam, stands up for the baby, saying it is "just a matter of coloring . . . Who is to say this color is right and that is not?" (120-123). Selvam, with his education, has become the voice for a new secular India, who offers protection to his sister and her child, when her parents cannot.

When Ira's young son, Sacrabani, asks what a bastard is, she responds, "It is a child whose birth his mother did not wish for" but when he asks her if she wishes he were born, she replies "yes of course, darling . . .I would not lose you for anything" (129). Ira regains her own lost innocence in her love for her child. Rukmani too finally finds renewed hope after her husband Nathan dies in the city. She returns to the village with her adopted child, Puli, himself a broken fledgling, orphaned and a victim of leprosy. As Nathan dies, he reassures Rukmani that he lives "in his children" (187), connecting past and future. As an analogy for India, Puli and Sacrabani represent her poor and downtrodden and Markandaya's message is for India to succeed, it cannot leave its destitute masses behind. Rukmani's son, Selvam, with his new scientific knowledge can also serve India. In addition to emphasizing the worth of India's children, the impoverished as well as the fortunate, Markandaya, through Rukmani and Ira, affirms the continued importance of motherhood, biological or otherwise, in insuring the growth of a new nation.

Chapter V

Conclusion

In her seminal essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak questions the essentialization that can occur when one constituent, be it a Western academic, subaltern feminist, or in this particular case, the upper-class woman writer who serves as a "native informant," seeks to represent the Other (284). Much of this thesis has dealt with the issue of representation and authenticity. Spivak raises vital questions as to the "right" of academics/intellectuals to assume a position and know the intentions of one's subject which I feel are important to acknowledge in the context of my work in this thesis. My own subject position is as a woman of Indian origin and as a mother. My own experience is what led me to the subject but I have attempted to not make assumptions about the intent of the author based on my own position.

The Other is of course a creation of the dominant (Western) hegemony and is the "self's shadow" (280). It is a historically circumscribed signifier which is defined by what it is not and is shrouded in mystery. The Other signifies a lack, being the shadow of the self (the assumption being that the self is Western/European/Ex-colonial power). The term "subaltern" itself is extremely problematic in its definition—as "sub" and "altern," and as a homogeneous Other. I have attempted to show that Spivak points out that subaltern women have two strikes against them—as subalterns and as women. In colonial India, women's interests were represented by British policy and by male nationalists with little voice of their own. Spivak concludes that "there is no space from

which the sexed subaltern can speak" (303). I have struggled with this proclamation which I feel falls prey to the same kind of reductive thinking that Spivak so brilliantly calls in to question. In setting out to study nineteenth century women writers in India, I found that the "sexed subaltern" did in fact speak. Because the woman writer is dependent on the "permission" of the hegemony to speak, as was the case with all three writers who had strong male support to write/publish their novels, does not mean her voice was unheard at the time. The currents of Imperial and post-colonial history have silenced the voices of these writers—*Bianca* lay gathering dust in the archives of the British museum (Lal 163). *Kamala* was out of print for over a hundred years till it was edited and republished by Chandani Lokuge in 1998. Markandaya's novels lost favor because she lacked the "nationalist posture . . . expected (by those in the Western and in the Indian literary, academic, and publishing worlds) of the Indian writer in the second half of the twentieth century" (George 401).

Although all three women writers had complicated positions as members of an elite class, as English speakers, and to some degree as "native informants," they did not essentialize women's experience. Dutt's preoccupations in her fiction are deeply personal, stemming from her multiple loyalties to India and to Britain. Satthianadhan's agenda speaks for many Hindu women but makes no claim to represent all Indian women's experience. Markandaya represents the plight of a peasant woman which is slightly more problematic under Spivak's critique because Markandaya's class constituency makes her unable to speak for one who is more subaltern than she. Her

novel wrestles with nationalist ideals of womanhood that were reductive in their simplicity and effected women in more than one class.

In academia, Spivak does not see the problem of women's representation as being resolved in the "positivist inclusion of a monolithic collectivity of 'women' in the list of the oppressed whose unfractured subjectivity allows them to speak for themselves against an equally monolithic 'same system'" (73). The patriarchy under the rubric of nationalist ideology did function as the "same system" but the resistance to it varied in each writer's narrative situation. I attempted to uncover how three Indian women writers in the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century responded to the roles assigned to women in their time, and how they navigated alongside social boundaries that were largely limiting to women.

In the imported genre of the novel, the fate of the individual is the central concern of the narrative. By telling an individual story, I argued that these women writers contributed towards unraveling the one-dimensional image of "woman" as upper class, usually Hindu, and in need of rescue by the British and Indian male reformers. Dutt, Satthianadhan, and Markandaya, created heroines who suffered under the strict boundaries set for women in their roles as daughters, daughters-in-law, and then as mothers. When they crossed those boundaries, social power was disciplinary and they were forced to "get in line." Bianca, suffers a mental break when she has to obey her father. Kamala, is starved and treated as a pariah by her in-laws. Rukmani is mocked for being able to write. When Irawaddy prostitutes her body in order to feed her brother, her own mother attacks her. The suffering woman is a trope in nineteenth

and early twentieth century Indian literature but Dutt, Satthianadhan, and Markandaya move beyond the stereotype of the helpless victim to create heroines who learn to fulfill aspects of themselves denied by an oppressive patriarchal system. The stereotype of the oppressed Indian woman, as promoted by the colonizer, well-meaning reformers, and even to some extent current Western academia, is not so much as untrue as incomplete. Just as the characters' responses to oppression are not alike, the ways in which they are oppressed can not be simplified into "Indian men do not know how to treat women." The truth is far more nuanced.

There are however commonalities that drew me to study the three novels together. The emphasis on women's roles as nurturers is an important consideration in each novel. Rather than viewing motherhood as being some "essential" biologistic component of being a woman, I have interpreted motherhood to be a unique position in which women are able to define the parameters of their relationships. Motherhood is a way to stay within acceptable social norms and receive sanction as a woman. It offers women a way to affirm their bodies without sex which is fraught with the need to submit to another's needs—in either giving birth or in the physical closeness between mother and child. Finally, it is a way to achieve religious salvation in performing one's sacred duty (which in Hinduism is the only way a woman can achieve release from the cycle of birth and death). Kamala, Rukmani, and Ira despite also being biological mothers, become surrogate mothers to the needy after they are released from marriage, highlighting the gendered nature of religious service. Dutt's Bianca also embodies the ideal of woman's nurturing as a spiritual ideal. Motherhood is formative

but not the central definitive aspect or a teleological end of each novel. Rather the heroines come to it at a point in their lives and then continue as mothers even after they have passed their reproductive years. Motherhood, as experienced by the characters, is subject to varying exigencies--class, religion, region, and historical context. Under the shadow of mythic (abstract) motherhood as propagated by nationalists, Dutt, Satthianadhan, and Markandaya interpret motherhood as both grounded in the material and spiritual lives of Indian woman.

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